REVOLVER

ISSUE 163
SPRING 2023

METALLICA

Spiritbox // Bad Omens // nothing,nowhere. // Dez Fafara // Periphery // Godsmack
Jesus Piece // Scowl // Buggin // SpiritWorld // Taipei Houston // Brand of Sacrifice

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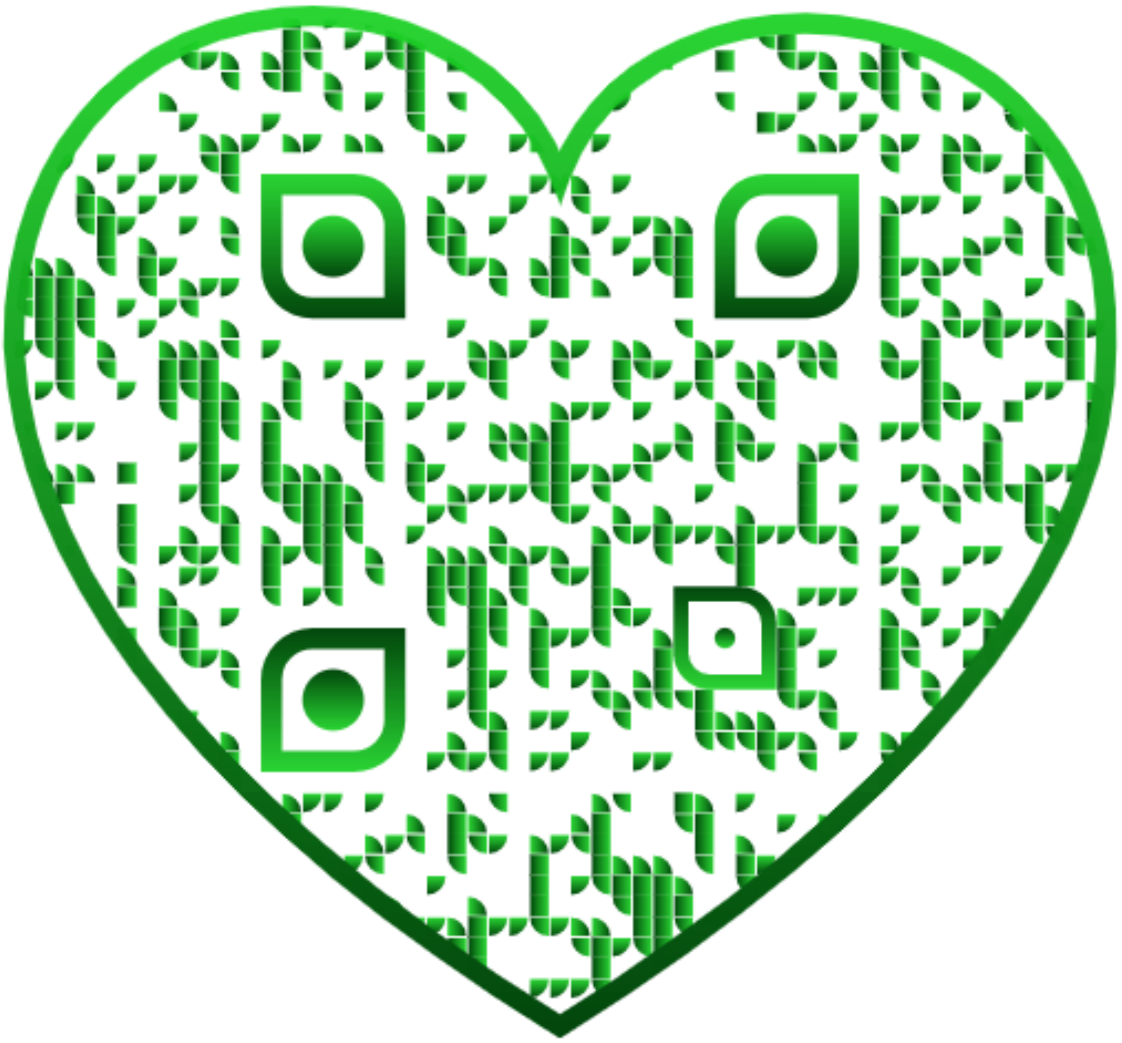

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SPIRITBOX

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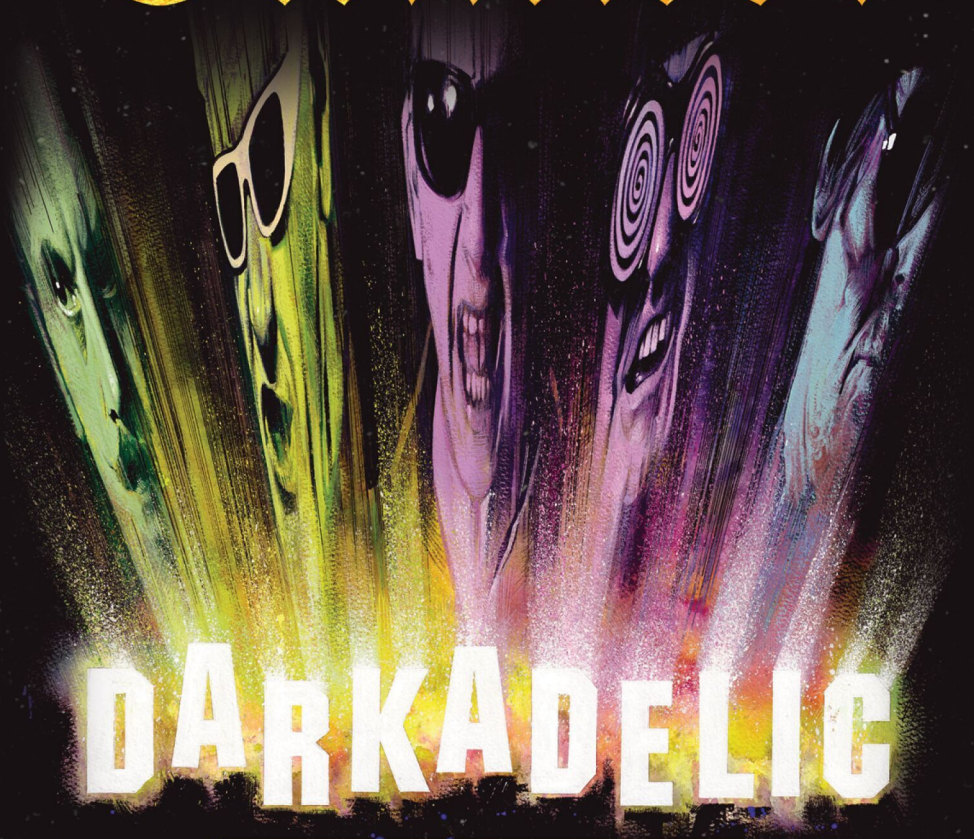

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DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY
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KREATOR · THE VIOLENT · STARCRAWLER · HAMMERHEDD · OTTTO
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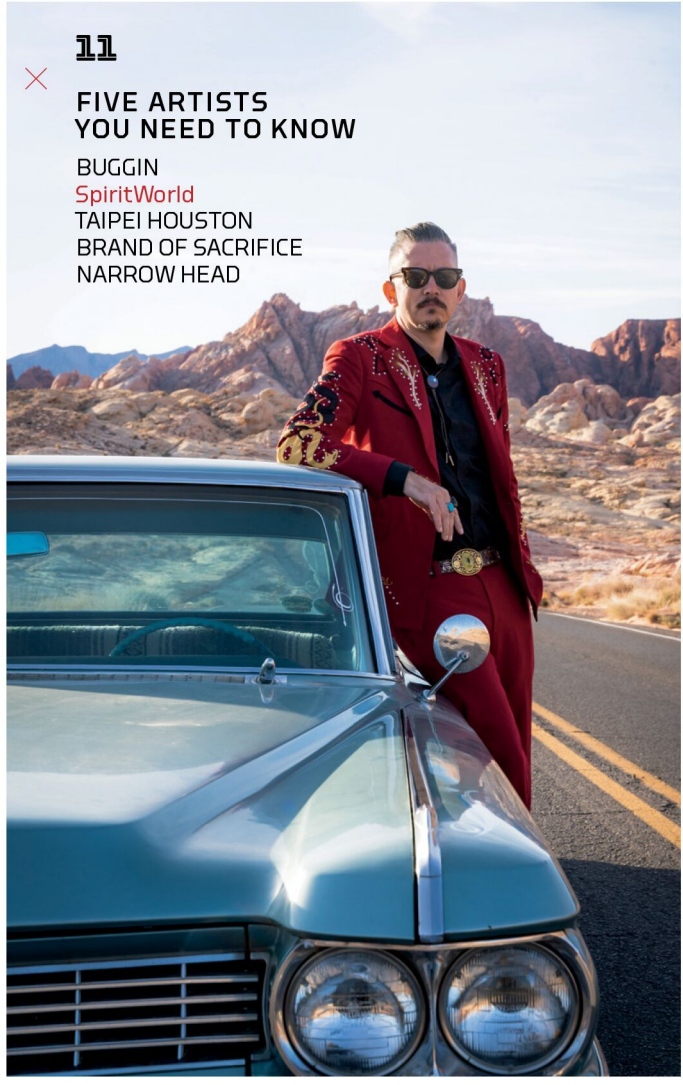

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TAIPEI HOUSTON
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SUMMER 2023

Ghost

SPECIAL GUEST

Amon Amarth

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AUG 11	ST. LOUIS, MO	HOLLYWOOD CASINO AMPHITHEATRE
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AUG 20	BRIDGEPORT, CT	HARTFORD HEALTHCARE AMPHITHEATER
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SEP 5	IRVING, TX	THE PAVILION AT TOYOTA MUSIC FACTORY
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JIMMY HUBBARD

IF YOU'RE A PARENT LIKE I AM, THEN YOU PROBABLY KNOW THAT THE METALLICA *Stranger Things* bump was very much for real. My daughter, who's now 11, has been a Metallica fan since she was, like, 4 years old — "Seek and Destroy" and "Creeping Death" were her early faves — but as soon as that *Stranger Things* episode aired, suddenly all her friends, even the ones who otherwise only listen to pop, were singing "Master of Puppets." It was a little weird, but mostly it was awesome.

In the wake of Metallica's *Stranger Things* moment, there was a lot of talk about gatekeeping, and as a heavy-metal lifer, I can understand many metalheads' instinctual disdain for trend-hopping, fair-weather fans. Just days ago, as I write this, my wife and I were lucky enough to be among the 650-some people at the Deftones' Marc Jacobs show in Brooklyn, which was packed with baby-faced fashionistas. After the Deftones played — and they were particularly awesome that night — my wife overheard one model-y young woman in the restroom telling another: "I liked it. It was cute." Eyeroll.

In truth, though, how could I possibly think of gatekeeping Metallica, when they were my own gateway band when I was a kid? Why would I want to block anyone from discovering the greatness — or even cuteness — of Deftones, my current favorite band? When you're driving a car full of kids home from school and "Master of Puppets" comes on the radio and they all start shouting along, a certain clarity sets in. It's just fun. It's heartwarming. It's awesome.

As Lars says in this issue's Metallica cover story, metal was a way for him, as "an awkward, isolated, loner kid," to connect with other people. I can certainly relate. It's one of the best things about heavy music, the way it can bring us together — across generations, ethnicity, gender, politics, social standing, whatever it might be. Maybe even across levels of fandom.

So, fuck gatekeeping. The posers and bandwagon jumpers will eventually filter themselves out anyway, and the die-hards will remain. In the meantime, let's just fucking enjoy the music — with whoever cares to sing along.

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FAME ON FIRE • DAYSEEKER • VENDED • MIKE'S DEAD

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GIOVANNIE & THE HIRED GUNS • MOTHICA • DEAD POET SOCIETY • THE VIOLENT
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UPRISING

Buggin, Disturbin' the Peace festival, Baltimore, 2023

ARTISTS YOU NEED TO KNOW NOW

FARRAH SKEIKY

Buggin, (from left) Dewey Butker, Peyton Roberts, Bryanna Bennett and Michael Rasmussen

Buggin

Turnstile-endorsed hardcore crew mix fun with fury because "fuck it, why not?"

IN SEPTEMBER 2021, HARDCORE UPSTARTS BUGGIN WERE ABOUT TO PLAY THEIR biggest show yet — opening for cult-favorites-turned-supersonic-force Turnstile at the 1,100-cap Metro in Buggin's hometown of Chicago. It was a monumental moment for the four-piece outfit — one made more fantastic for singer Bryanna Bennett when they were struck by a strange realization. They were opening for the very same band that just a few short years earlier Bennett had risked a grounding to go see.

"It was a full-circle moment for me. I definitely snuck out of my house to go see Turnstile one night at that venue … but I never got caught!" says the 24-year-old singer with a grin from their bedroom in Philadelphia, where they're intermittently interrupted by their three cats Moshi, Oliver and Pluto. Buggin unleashed an electrifying set that night, which not only won over the packed crowd, but caused the band — who formed in 2018 and whose current lineup includes drummer Michael Rasmussen, guitarist Peyton Roberts and bassist Dewey Butker — to instantly rise a couple of notches in the hardcore pantheon. The late, legendary Chicago-born fashion designer Virgil Abloh even followed them on Instagram straight after. In every sense, it was surreal.

"We [had mostly] played in people's fucking basements," says Bennett. "The people at the venue were like, 'We have your hummus and your beverages.' And we were like, 'What the hell are you talking about?'" They laugh, adding, "We started this band having no idea what the fuck we were gonna do. Our first show, we were out of tune, Michael dropped his drumsticks like three times — he had literally never played drums in front of anybody before. And a couple years later we're playing a sold-out show with Turnstile."

This spring, Buggin will unveil their debut album, *Concrete Cowboys*. The new full-length delivers on the excitement generated by the band's 2020 EP (released under their initial moniker Buggin Out) and 2021 single "Brainfreeze," the latter of which included a fiery B-side cover of Beastie Boys' "Gratitude" (featuring a production assist from Jesus Piece's Aaron Heard). Fans of those releases will recognize the same bouncy, aggressive sound and fun-loving, passionate sensibility — but also discover the band playing with new ideas (a little pop punk in "Redacted," a little surf rock in "Youth"), fleshing out their songs more richly, and carving out a distinct

TEXT Mia Hughes
PHOTOGRAPHY Farrah Skeiky

identity. "I think people who have been rocking with us since [the beginning] are gonna be excited to hear how fresh everything sounds," says Bennett. "This is the biggest thing that we've ever done, and I think it is definitely the best stuff we've ever done."

Bennett, who now lives in Philly, grew up in the suburbs of Chicago. "I was a really lonely kid. I didn't really have any friends," they recount. "It made me really angry — I hated everything around me." Music was a balm for that isolation and disillusionment. They first fell in love with Fall Out Boy and Paramore. "Seeing Hayley [Williams], I was like, damn, one day I wanna be in a band," they tell us. When Bennett discovered hardcore punk a few years later, another lightbulb turned on. "Hardcore felt relatable to me; it felt so raw and genuine. It's like, Oh, these guys recorded this on a fucking iPhone 7 in their mom's basement. I was searching for that authenticity, and I found it through hardcore."

As a teenager, Bennett started going to shows in Chicago and Milwaukee. "I literally gave my parents PowerPoint presentations on why they should let me go," Bennett laughs. That's where they met Rasmussen and Roberts. They were the youngest kids at every show, so they naturally banded together. Before long, the trio started to bounce around the idea of starting a group. "The Midwest area was well known for super-heavy beatdown stuff, but we wanted to see something else," says Bennett, adding that they aspired to emulate the fun, creatively free approach of bands like Turnstile and Angel Dust. The idea was sort of a joke at first. They weren't experienced and they didn't even own any gear. (In fact, they still don't have much; "I think we're finally getting a drumkit," Bennett tells me). But then, with the "fuck it, why not" mentality that defines the band to this day, they formed Buggin.

"We didn't think people were gonna fuck with it that much; we just wanted to hang out with each other and make something that we weren't seeing around us," says Bennett. "Making sure that we stay true to what we started out with is really important to me." As it turned out, their welcoming and fresh vibe resonated with people in their hometown and beyond. From their first demo, Buggin were a rising force in the hardcore scene, and they eventually earned a place on Flatspot Records (home of Scowl and Speed) for *Concrete Cowboys*. Rather than posturing or gatekeeping, they're a band that's all about having fun and celebrating individuality. "My attitude on life is that you just don't need to take yourself that seriously," says Bennett. "A lot of people are gonna have things to say to you, but you really have to not give a shit. I want people to step into their individuality, and that's what I try to instill with everything that we do."

Through this band, and the wider hardcore world, Bennett has surrounded themself with the friendship and community they were lacking as a lonely kid. Plus, they've found a vital outlet that has guided and shaped how they find their way in life. "I could have gotten into a lot of trouble as a teenager, but having a community [in which to] figure out, 'OK, what's a healthier way for me to express my anger besides going out on the streets and getting into fucked-up shit' — I think that's really, really crucial," they say. The *Concrete Cowboys* track "Get It Out," which Bennett describes as a "moshers' anthem," is an ode to that supportive space: "At the show, I see my bros/Escape from work and life's bullshit."

Still young but having grown up in the scene for almost a decade, Buggin are at the vanguard of this new generation's vision of hardcore — something they explore on the record's "most important" track "Youth," on which they snarl: "You can't stop the progress of this generation."

"With each generation we see them bringing new ideas into the culture and the mainstream, and I think that people really need to absorb that," Bennett says, adding that representation and space for people of color, women and LGBTQ folks has been a vital change for the scene in recent years.

That's something they put into action with the Darkside of the Moon West Coast tour, a celebration of the Black community in hardcore on which they embarked with Zulu, Move and Playytime last year. The reaction was stellar; the bands even heard from venue employees that they were blown away by the crowd's energy. "It was almost like a family reunion," says Bennett. "It's not something that's ever been done before. It was so surprising that people on the other side of the country were reacting to us in this way, when we've never been [there] before. People were hanging off the rafters!"

This is just the start for Buggin. They're a band with obvious heart, personality and style — and the brutal hardcore chops to back it up. They never expected to get this far, but they're not slowing down. "If you don't like something, change whatever it is that you don't like, and maybe you'll create something special on your own," Bennett says. "We're just trying to do the most we can while we can — and ride it until the wheels fall off."

Concrete Cowboys, 2023; *Buggin Out* EP, 2020

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02

SpiritWorld, (from left) Nick Brundy, Preston Harper, Stu Folsom, Matt Schrum and Randy Moore

TEXT Gregory Adams
PHOTOGRAPHY Matt Schrum and Matt Ojeda

SpiritWorld

How a former junior rodeo rider turned hardcore fanatic merged cowboy culture and Slayer riffs into a wild death-metal style

SPIRITWORLD VOCALIST STU FOLSOM CAME TO A crossroads as he entered his teens. While growing up between Nevada and Idaho, he was steeped in cowboy culture. His family tended livestock at home, and his cousins competed within the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. He was in junior rodeo for a spell, too — until a fateful trip to Austin the summer before ninth grade put Folsom (born Stu Brundy) and his brother (current SpiritWorld bassist Nick Brundy) into the orbit of a group of "anarchist punk rockers." Suddenly, the prospect of moshing with your friends seemed more up his alley — and a hell of a lot safer — than strapping yourself onto a bucking Brahma bull.

"I was pretty skinny — still am— but as I started to mature, you get to that realization where bulls start getting pretty big, like, that's a thousand-pound animal!" he exclaims. "If you're a little scrawny dude, you've got to make a decision: Are you fully psychotic and going to be a bull rider, or are you going to go skateboard, smoke weed and hang out with the hooligans?"

Turns out the hooligans won. It's been nearly thirty years since Folsom hung up his rodeo spurs, and in that time, he's dug his heels deep into Las Vegas' hardcore community. At the turn of the century, he became the longtime vocalist of his namesake band Folsom, who conjured scene pride in beatdowns like "The City of Sin." Further investing in his community, he'd book shows for bands like Terror and Integrity at a literal junkyard venue dubbed the Hammer House. "We had a forklift. We took a bunch of old cars and lined them so we kind of had walls," Folsom recalls of one standout mid-Aughts concert moment at the outdoor space. "There were kids head-walking from the cars across the other kids. When my band [Folsom] played there were people [swinging around] tires and palettes. It was straight out of *Mad Max*."

These days, Folsom is conjuring a different kind of dystopia through his work with SpiritWorld, a band that combines the intensity of metal with his Western roots. On 2022's *DEATHWESTERN*, the group's sophomore album (and debut for Century Media Records), SpiritWorld deliver detuned, thrash-imbued nastiness beneath lead growler Folsom's gore-glopped tales of degenerate desperadoes battling supernatural demons on the desert plains. Live, the band bound into big-time breakdowns while wearing cowboy hats, pearl-snap shirts and elegantly sequined Nudie suits. It's an awesomely perplexing culture-jam, and one that's made fans and tourmates of Obituary and Agnostic Front and earned them a spot on this year's "Klash of the Titans" run with Sepultura, Death Angel and Kreator. Folsom appreciates the cognitive dissonance going on as you're hearing old-school death metal coming at you from a group of guys that look like they should be grandstanding at the Grand Ole Opry.

"We're a weird band," Folsom admits. "We stick out like a sore thumb. We sound like a mix between Slayer and Sick of It All, but visually it's a whole different identity."

He continues: "We walk out onstage lookin' like a

DEATHWESTERN, 2022; *Pagan Rhythms*, 2020

honky-tonk band, and all these metalheads and hardcore kids look at us like we're the stupidest fucking thing they've ever seen, but about 20 minutes in, even the biggest hater is banging their head."

To be fair, there is some sonic crossover on *DEATHWESTERN*. Take how the lilting, fingerpicked acoustic intro of "The Heretic Butcher" offers up tumbleweed-propelling, film-score ambiance — at least before SpiritWorld bludgeon listeners with chest-compressing drums and south-of-heaven riffage. Folsom's yee-hawin' aesthetics were even more pronounced when he began the project. On their first release, *Demo 2017*, his shouted vocal delivery paid homage to hardcore, while SpiritWorld's twangy, reverb-heavy guitar tone evoked the Hollywood Honky Tonk of early Dwight Yoakam. Fittingly, the demo also featured a snatch of dialogue Yoakam delivered in the mid-Nineties drama *Sling Blade*. (The musician-cum-actor's brayed delivery of "We ain't got no band" was a sort of in-joke for Folsom's then studio-only outfit.)

"I want to combine my love of roots music, punk rock, hardcore and metal, and explore my own path through there," Folsom sums up of SpiritWorld's overall mission. Though, over time, the scales have shifted towards the heavier side of things.

On 2020's debut full-length *Pagan Rhythms*, the guitar tone gets nastier, the tempos more breakneck. Lyrically, Folsom began connecting SpiritWorld tunes with the horrific tales of merciless outlaws and necrophile priests he'd been crafting for his short story collection, *Godlessness*. (The book was dedicated to the memory of late Power Trip leader Riley Gale, who also helped edit the stories.) *DEATHWESTERN* likewise follows these morally corrupt characters, now faced with protecting humanity from monsters spurting out of a gate to hell. "I took a U-turn with these concept albums [*Pagan Rhythms* and *DEATHWESTERN*]. I didn't intend on shifting musical styles," he says, adding matter-of-factly, "you follow your muse."

Folsom came across scenes of violence at hardcore shows over the years, usually through "warring factions" embroiled in petty, fists-swingin' scene beef. *Godlessness*, however, works through an imagined, yet unflinchingly vicious depravity.

"That's some pretty life-ending, horrific shit, where somebody is ripping a woman's mandible off," Folsom notes of a particularly brutal confrontation in *Godlessness*. "I don't like to glorify that stuff because I'm very uncomfortable [with violence]. Although I do touch on ultraviolence and themes of faithlessness, and write incredibly heavy music, I'm a pretty positive guy. I believe in turning the other cheek and leading with love. But I don't shy away from the fact that this stuff still bleeds into what I find interesting. I still like films that have very sudden explosions of horror."

As the musical and thematic directions have shifted, so has SpiritWorld's external makeup. Along with his brother Nick on bass, the current live lineup features Matt Schrum and Randy Moore on guitars, Preston Harper on drums and, occasionally, Wristmeetrazor's Justin Fornof handling samples and backup vocals. SpiritWorld is still Folsom's singular vision — he writes and demos all songs — but its full potential is realized with the help of his friends.

"Just like you would if you made a film, the directors aren't the ones doing all the practical or digital effects," he explains. "You have an idea and then you bring the expert to that piece. I approach records the same way." This philosophy likewise extends to the guest howls Integrity vocalist Dwid Hellion brings to *DEATHWESTERN*'s "Moonlit Torture," a demonic duet 20 years in the making, considering Folsom first met Hellion when he booked the Cleveland hardcore icons to play Hammer House. "That period of my life still informs things I do today," Folsom says proudly.

The day he's reached by *Revolver*, Folsom is riffing out ideas for the third SpiritWorld LP. He adds that the finale of the trilogy he began with *Pagan Rhythms* will likewise connect to another short story collection. He's tightlipped about the plot specifics, but Folsom hints that there will be some bloodshed. ("I've definitely killed off some characters I really liked. That's sad… but I won't spoil it.") And while he currently embraces a very specific, trail-dust-and-viscera-coated aesthetic, that's not to say Folsom's tastes won't shift. From here, he's envisioning what the future holds for SpiritWorld, both in our reality and his fictional domain.

"I want to explore what happens in the same world, but fast forward so it's maybe 2050. I think it would be really cool to tie it into electronic music. Industrial stuff. I could totally see myself doing a *Blade Runner*-meets-Ministry thing," he says, though the former rodeo rider bullishly asserts SpiritWorld is not leaving their gothic Western hellscape just yet. "You gotta ride the hot hand, too. Like, I told Century Media I'd give them three sick records, so let's get that done and then figure out what's next."

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Taipei Houston, (from left) Layne and Myles Ulrich

TEXT Eli Enis
PHOTOGRAPHY Natalie Hewitt

Taipei Houston

Layne and Myles Ulrich may descend from thrash-metal royalty, but these brothers aren't trying to claim that throne. Instead, the duo is staging their own garage-rock revolt.

THE WHITE STRIPES HAVE A SONG CALLED "LITTLE Room." Released in 2001, the 50-second ditty is quite literally an ode to the cramped quarters that fledgling musicians endure when they're first stoking their creative mojo — and why those intimate spaces are oftentimes more conducive to grand ideas than sprawling, big-budget practice pads.

Taipei Houston are in their own little room when they make contact with *Revolver*. The two musicians, Layne and Myles Ulrich, are squished in front of a webcam that's framing them from the chest up, while the majority of the room behind them is packed with music gear. No wall art or homely amenities; just musical equipment resting casually against the bare walls, like it was dropped there after being lugged back from a late-night gig.

Like the White Stripes, Taipei Houston are a two-piece garage-rock band helmed by people with the same last name. But that's where the parallels end. Unlike Jack and Meg White, the Ulrichs are actual siblings. And the surname bassist-vocalist Layne, 21, and drummer Myles, 24, share happens to be the same as a certain world-renowned metal drummer (more on that later). But first and foremost, as brothers, friends and musical co-conspirators, they have an impressively healthy and productive bond.

They've lived together almost their entire lives, including now, at their East Los Angeles apartment. Back in 2020, during the start of the pandemic, they found themselves cooped up in their home city of San Francisco. And instead of getting at each other's throats, they figured they'd form a band. "It definitely feels like we're almost telepathic at this point," Myles says of their relationship. "There's an older brother and a younger brother [dynamic]," Layne adds. "We always had this partnership."

Last fall, their creative telepathy materialized in the form of Taipei Houston's debut album, *Once Bit Never Bored*, a 30-minute surge of sweaty, white-knuckle rawk & roll that channels the desert-rock *oomph* of Fu Manchu and the hooky fizz of the Strokes in equal measure. The Ulrichs wrote, performed and produced the entire LP themselves — a totally new experience for the brothers, since Taipei Houston is their first real band. However, nothing about the record rings amateurish. Rock is in their blood, after all.

Which brings us back to the Metallica-sized elephant in the room. Myles and Layne's dad is, of course, Lars Ulrich, co-founder of the biggest metal band of all time. However, despite coming up in the household of a thrash-metal pioneer, the heaviest music either of them connected with as youths was Black Sabbath and AC/DC. Growing up in the 2000s amid the inescapable garage-rock revival, their favorite bands are the Strokes and Arctic Monkeys.

Unlike Metallica frontman James Hetfield's son Castor and bassist Robert Trujillo's son Tye, who've also kick-started bands of their own in recent years, the Ulrich boys didn't spend much time backstage at Metallica shows in their youth — or if they did, it's not something they're interested in discussing during a conversation about Taipei Houston. When their dad comes up in relation to their band, they make it abundantly clear that riding his coattails has never been their motive. In fact, Myles asserts that he and his brother grew up pretty well insulated from the grand spectacle of Metallica.

"We stayed in the suburbs just being kids and

Once Bit Never Bored, 2022

just listening to music on our own, doing our own thing," he says. "My dream is for Taipei Houston to be completely its own thing that has nothing to do with any of that."

They're not openly defying expectations based on their family history; they're simply making the music they want to hear. That said, rebellion is a major motivating factor for Taipei Houston. Their sound is raw and organic, and the inertia in their delivery is a welcomed kick in the ass during an era when the broader guitar zeitgeist is dominated by the lackadaisical strums of Steve Lacy and the sanitized pop-punk mews of Machine Gun Kelly. Taipei Houston use the word "perpendicular" to describe their musical approach on *Once Bit Never Bored* — as in the opposite of a rock norm that's passive and snoozy to their ears.

"I think there's a general feeling of sameness nowadays," says Myles. "The way social media and our world works, we're very much entertained at every second and lullabied into a certain way of feeling all the time … I think that rock music — specifically music that feels energetic or feels intense — is such a [counter] to that. The point of Taipei, rather than being really heavy or something, is to make something that's surprising and grabs your attention."

On *Once Bit Never Bored*, Taipei Houston succeed in that way by making the ruckus feel genuine. Myles' mission statement doesn't read all that differently from the subtext of ham-fisted retro rockers like Greta Van Fleet and Måneskin, whose schtick centers on parroting vintage rock tropes like historical reenactors. But Taipei Houston aren't trying to evoke a romanticized past or pander to people's nostalgic instincts. They consider themselves distinctly modernist artists.

"When we were making our first record, I was very much like, 'Fuck 2021, fuck Instagram, fuck TikTok. I wish it was the early Seventies or the early Nineties,'" Myles explains. "Now what I've come to realize is that all the best bands that we loved from those times hated everything that was going on then and made rebellious music for that time."

Today, he and Layne have a new philosophy — one that grounds them in the "now" of their little room, where they're unaffected by outside forces and free to follow their muse. "Find a way to exist now instead of being escapist, like, 'Oh, I wish it was 40 years ago because that was so much cooler,'" Myles concludes. "Find a way to rebel against the day you're in."

Brand of Sacrifice

From his manga-inspired deathcore to a successful tie-dye streetwear line, Kyle Anderson is used to turning heads. And he's just getting started.

TEXT Dan Epstein
PHOTOGRAPHY Travis Shinn

"I ALWAYS FELT LIKE IF YOU ENJOY HEAVY MUSIC, or death metal or hardcore, you could read our lyrics and get something out of them," says Brand of Sacrifice vocalist Kyle Anderson. "But it was also an 'if you know, you *know*' kind of situation — and I feel like it's time now to start to talk about what *I* want to talk about."

Indeed, everything about 2021's *Lifeblood*, the Canadian deathcore band's ripping sophomore album, would totally hit home even if you didn't know that the Toronto-based quintet — which also includes guitarist/producer Leo Valeri, guitarist Liam Beeson, bassist Dallas Bricker and new drummer Mike Caputo — was formed specifically to write and play songs based upon the art of the late Japanese manga creator Kentaro Miura and his long-running *Berserk* series. But while Brand of Sacrifice aren't exactly leaving their manga roots behind on *Between Death and Dreams*, their brutal new four-song EP, they're not painting themselves into a conceptual corner either.

Take "Blinded," the EP's opening track. With its glitchy synths, assaultive blast-beats and Anderson's scarifying vocals, the song's music is very much of a piece with *Lifeblood*, but the lyrics cut closer to the bone. "'Blinded' touches on addiction issues, and how those can impact the people that are closest to you the most," Anderson explains. "It could be a situation where you have a partner that hangs around because they care about you, because they want to see you move forward, and you almost pull them down with you. We haven't really touched on anything like that in the past; but this is something that has impacted my family, historically, and something that I know many people around me struggle with. I heard the instrumental when Leo completed it, and I felt compelled to write about it; it just sort of came to me all at once."

And while Anderson's lyrics for "Exodus," the lead single from the EP, do reference the treacherous actions of Griffith, the monomaniacal leader of *Berserk*'s mercenary army, the song's themes should resonate with anyone that has a knowledge of authoritarian regimes. "He has his own dream and will do anything to achieve that dream, even if it's sacrificing those around him to do it," says Anderson. "We've seen things like that occur many times in history. The song also talks about what happens when a lot of other people have subscribed to that dream and follow along without being rational. In a lot of those situations, it's not something that happens instantaneously; it's a lot of incremental decisions that people make, where the moral compass you once had starts to fade away. It's a lot of micro decisions, but it affects the macro — though you often don't see that until you look back years later."

Of course, small decisions can lead to hugely positive outcomes, as well, something that Anderson and Valeri know firsthand via the success of their streetwear brand Shibori Threads. Initially conceived as a way to stay creatively occupied and maybe even make a little money for the band during COVID-19 lockdown, Shibori Threads — which specializes in high-end, limited-run band apparel featuring handmade tie-dye patterns and fluorescent colors — has become so successful that it was even featured last year in the venerable financial magazine *Forbes*.

"We didn't imagine this happening at all," Anderson laughs. "It just started off during the pandemic when things were all shut down and we weren't quite sure

Brand of Sacrifice, (from left) Mike Caputo, Leo Valeri, Kyle Anderson, Dallas Bricker and Liam Beeson

Between Death and Dreams EP, 2023; *Lifeblood*, 2021; *God Hand*, 2019

when we would be able to tour again, or what was gonna happen; everything was up in the air. And because bands weren't touring, it was a little bit of a worry financially for a lot of us. Leo and I had always been interested in creating some merch that was a little bit different from what you'd typically see for a death-metal band or deathcore band — something that was more bright and intricate. We'd always hired designers in the past to just make some designs and print 'em on a black shirt or whatever. But both Leo and I have some Photoshop experience and some background with that, and we actually found it was quite fun to mock-up designs and different dye patterns for hoodies and whatnot. We started off doing it for Brand of Sacrifice, but then we extended it to bands that were friends of ours; it really caught on from the first drop, and it had a snowball effect from there."

Recent Shibori Threads drops have featured items designed for Jinjer, Cradle of Filth, Animals as Leaders, the Contortionist and I Prevail. "The majority of the profits go to the band," Anderson explains, "and it's something the fan enjoys because no two items are the same, and they're super-limited; we only do a style once, and we don't bring them back." The line's success has resulted in some unexpected opportunities beyond the fashion world, as well. "We can't say exactly what it is just yet," Anderson teases, "but we're gonna be working with [Japanese video game publisher] Bandai Namco on a drop. That's a sidestep that we would definitely like to take because gaming is something we have a huge interest in, as well."

Though he's taken quickly to the streetwear world, Anderson says sneaker culture is his true passion. "I played a lot of basketball as a kid and growing up I was a huge fan of the AND1 brand and the streetball mixtapes they used to put out. From there, I started enjoying the Jordan brand, and I'm still a huge fan. It would be amazing to actually make a Shibori sneaker one day; I'm starting to look into how we can do that, and what it would look like."

Given the buzz generated by Shibori Threads, one could hardly blame Anderson and Valeri for putting Brand of Sacrifice on the back burner while they concentrate on growing their streetwear empire; but for now it's still full speed ahead with their music, as well. "We've directly started writing the new record," says Anderson. "We're still sorting out who we're going to put it out through, or if we're going to do it independently, but the goal is to get a record out by the end of the year, if not early next year…"

"The tracks on this EP, I feel they sort of showcase the different things that we're capable of doing, while still being loosely connected," he continues. "There's an array of heavy and melodic sounds, as well as the use of electronics and choirs — and all those things will be in place on our next full-length record, plus more!"

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TEXT Jeff Terich
PHOTOGRAPHY Owen Lehman

Narrow Head

Tragedy-tested Houston grunge-gazers emerge from darkness with a new life-affirming outlook and their most powerful musical statement to date

IN EARLY 2020 NARROW HEAD WERE RIDING HIGH. The grungy post-hardcore Texas outfit were about to release their sophomore album, *12th House Rock*. They'd been playing increasingly prominent shows, opening for Quicksand, Turnstile and more, and their fanbase — which already boasted notable supporters including Power Trip's Riley Gale — was growing quickly. But then, COVID-19 arrived and Narrow Head's world came crashing down.

"Some of our friends passed away," reveals singer-guitarist Jacob Duarte. Included among the losses was Gale, who tragically died that August. "It was in the middle of the pandemic, and when you lose someone... Waking up the next day, I mean we were pretty depressed for a while."

Duarte's grief was overwhelming, but as he confronted and processed his pain something unexpected occurred: a shocking moment of clarity. The realization of life's impermanence — and making the most of the time one has — altered his entire personal and artistic outlook. This psychic shift eventually inspired the creation of Narrow Head's latest full-length, the aptly titled *Moments of Clarity*. The group's third album is Duarte and Co. at their most emotionally open and musically ambitious — offering glimpses of their hardcore roots through richly melodic songwriting and hazy shoegaze effects, and cementing their position as one of the most exciting new voices in contemporary grunge.

"Things are different now," the 28-year-old Duarte tells *Revolver* in December 2022, on a Zoom call from his Houston home. "I feel more of a drive to continue and do things. Life is short, and there's a lot I haven't done yet that I'd like to do. I see things in a different light."

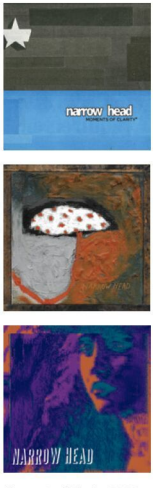
Duarte's new positive outlook has also deepened his commitment to spread the word that "rock music is still alive." It's an abiding belief that's propelled him for over a decade, and as he's followed that path, his sense of purpose has only become more pronounced.

Growing up in Houston, Duarte was raised around music. His father and uncle played in a Nineties emo band called the Tie That Binds (who were onetime labelmates of At the Drive-In), and he was learning guitar by sixth grade (everything from Slayer to blink-182). As a teenager, he dove headfirst into his local hardcore scene. Then, at 18, he founded Narrow Head and turned that punk education into a hook-driven take on grunge and post-hardcore. Duarte's recent moment of clarity may have been his most profound yet, but Narrow Head's trajectory has been marked by many small epiphanies along the way — and lots of hard work.

"For the first couple years, we didn't really know how to play live," he says. "In the studio, you can layer stuff and put a bunch of pedals on it. But playing live, we only have what's in front of us. We were too loud, but not in a good way."

As Narrow Head have clocked more time on the road, they've tightened up and pared down the rough edges — an effort that's evident in their powerful live performances (including their dynamic 2022 Outbreak Fest set). The band — whose current lineup includes guitarists Kora Puckett and William Menjivar, bassist Rubio Richie and drummer Carson Wilcox — have also become just as sophisticated a studio entity, as heard on *Moments of Clarity*.

It's a brighter and more pop-focused album, due in part to producer and engineer Sonny DiPerri (My Bloody Valentine, Trent Reznor, Portugal. The Man), who encouraged Duarte to push himself further vocally — resulting in bittersweet, blissful moments ("Moments of Clarity") and power-pop harmonies ("Sunday"). The band have also embraced a more sonically diverse approach as well, whether in the Smashing Pumpkins-like acoustic-to-fuzz rise of



Moments of Clarity, 2023; *12th House Rock*, 2020; *Satisfaction*, 2016

"Breakup Song" or the breakbeat loops in "Soft to Touch." The heaviness that bolsters their sound — a remnant of the hardcore scene from which they emerged (and that Duarte still participates in as a member of Skourge) — still remains. But it's the dichotomy, "the heavy parts heavier and the poppy parts poppier," that they most wanted to emphasize.

"We're all into heavy music, hardcore and metal. But that's not the first stuff we heard," Duarte explains. "We all grew up listening to the radio. I feel like [the balance] comes pretty naturally for us."

Moments of Clarity also showcases how far Duarte has come as a lyricist. The album presents the singer's most introspective, and poetic, songs yet. He meditates on impermanence in "The Real," and the feeling of losing oneself in sonic oblivion on the soaring "The Comedown." The outlook in Narrow Head's songs have changed; in large part because Duarte himself has changed, casting aside moments of despair or self-loathing in favor of something more hopeful.

Duarte is putting that hope into action by working even harder to realize his artistic dreams — and getting his music in front of even more audiences. Narrow Head will start 2023 supporting garage punks White Reaper (alongside indie duo Taipei Houston, featuring Lars Ulrich's sons), before embarking on their own headlining run. They're also booked at the Sick New World Festival in May with Korn, System of a Down and, Duarte's own biggest influence, Deftones. Seeing Chino Moreno and Co. on the lineup ensured he couldn't say no; but he's just as thrilled to be playing among the fest's industrial acts and old-school goths, like Ministry and the Sisters of Mercy. For Duarte, the broader the audience, the better.

"There's people who don't know anything about hardcore and they find Narrow Head and like it," he says. "We're accessible to a wide variety of separate groups, and that's what we're going for. That's how you become the biggest band ever. You don't have to be a metalhead or a goth."

He hesitates, briefly, before clarifying: "But I want the goth fans, too."

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Metallica, 2023

REBELS, INNOVATORS AND ICONOCLASTS

TIM SACCENTI

Meta

alica

The thrash titans are back with their first album in nearly seven years. Drummer **Lars Ulrich** unpacks ***72 Seasons*** – and lays out how these "disenfranchised misfits" became the biggest metal band in the world.

TEXT **J. Bennett** PHOTOGRAPHY **Tim Saccenti**

LARS ULRICH SEEMS HESITANT. WELL, MAYBE HESITANT ISN'T THE RIGHT WORD. Cautious is more like it. Tentative, perhaps. Then he comes right out and says it: "This is my first interview for this album, so be nice to me."

The album he's talking about is *72 Seasons*, the first Metallica record in nearly seven years, and the long-awaited follow-up to 2016's *Hardwired... to Self-Destruct*. But it's not the new album that has him feeling vulnerable. "I can't even remember the last time I did an interview," he explains.

Birthed in the crucible of the pandemic, *72 Seasons* isn't just a new Metallica album. In many ways, it's the reintroduction of a band that occupies a new, somehow even more exalted position in the pop-culture pantheon than they did before COVID. Part of that is the massive boost Metallica received — not that they needed it — from their 1986 classic "Master of Puppets" being featured prominently in Netflix's retro sci-fi series *Stranger Things*. And part of it is a viral video of Ulrich, guitarist Kirk Hammett and bassist Robert Trujillo hugging vocalist-guitarist James Hetfield onstage in Brazil last year after Hetfield admitted to the crowd that he was feeling a bit old and insecure. This would've been unthinkable in the Eighties when Metallica were an unstoppable, and unflinching, testosterone-and-beer-fueled thrash machine touring with the likes of Venom and Ozzy.

As it turns out, the 2023 version of Metallica is a different beast entirely. They don't simply hire overpriced shrinks — as seen in the notorious 2004 documentary, *Some Kind of Monster* — to iron out creative differences and mediate interband conflict. They actually talk about their feelings. Onstage, even. And it's likely that the songs on *72 Seasons* are more personal than ever.

Musically, the album is almost an overview of the band's 42-year career. The title track, "Shadows Follow" and "Too Far Gone?" revive the frenetic thrash of Metallica's early days; "You Must Burn!" sounds like something that could've been on the Black Album; "Sleepwalk My Life Away" and "Chasing Light" boast rock grooves that split the difference between the *Load/Reload* era and something their friends in Corrosion of Conformity might write. Meanwhile, lead single "Lux Æterna" seems like a tribute to Diamond Head, the New Wave of British Heavy Metal band that provided some of Metallica's earliest inspiration. And 11-minute closer "Inamorata" somehow manages to invoke both Kyuss and Metallica's towering 1986 instrumental "Orion."

Based on the concept that the first 18 years of life impact us for the rest of it, *72 Seasons* deals in nostalgia ("Lux Æterna"), self-harm ("Screaming Suicide") and self-reflection ("Room of Mirrors," "Sleepwalk My Life Away"), among other seemingly introspective topics. Not that Ulrich — or Hetfield, who wrote the lyrics — will confirm or deny any specifics.

"The theme of the record, to me, is about how your experiences over the course of your life continue to shape you and affect the decisions that you make — and who you are," Ulrich says. "In the song '72 Seasons,' James had this concept that everything about who we'd become later in life is really shaped in those first 72 seasons. Everybody felt that was really interesting, but so much of what we do is really just instinctive. At the end of the day, it's just four guys throwing ideas at each other. You do the best you can in the moment and hope you land in the right place."

YOU AND JAMES WERE 18 WHEN YOU STARTED METALLICA, WEREN'T YOU? IS PART OF *72 SEASONS* ABOUT LOOKING BACK AT YOUR OWN ORIGIN STORY?
LARS ULRICH That's a great question. I don't think it's so much looking back on the band's origin story as it is looking back on each of our own stories. Obviously, for somebody who's been around as long as we have, those lines get blurred really quickly. Almost everything in my life, I correlate to a Metallica event because I've been in Metallica since I was... actually, I guess, 17. I was 17 when James and I met and started [the band]. And I turned 18 two or three months later. So, the timeline of basically my entire life threads in and out of the timeline of the band. You can't silo the two as two separate trajectories.

Of course, you sit around with your buddies and tell tall tales and war stories or whatever — I'll tell stories from the road or about all kinds of crazy shenanigans that we were up to — but I don't spend a lot of my time in the past. I spend, probably to a fault, too much of my time in the future and maybe not enough time in the present. But between the past, the present and the future, I definitely hang out mostly in the future. So, the correlating of the band's timeline to my own is obviously a really interesting point. And I think your question is valid. I just don't have an obvious answer.

YOU GUYS DIDN'T REFLECT ON THE PAST AT ALL WHEN YOU WERE WRITING?
That didn't come up so much in the discussions when we were riffing back and forth about where this was going, but I think it's a great point. Who would've thought that 42 years later, we'd still be doing interviews and talking about new records and all that? It's kind of crazy to sit here in my late fifties [still doing this]. Kirk has already joined the 60 club, and the rest of us are right behind him.

But I think we're very comfortable with who we are right now. Age and experience are a part of who we are that we don't want to downplay or run away from. All these experiences have obviously shaped who we are up till this moment and will continue to shape who we are in the next moments. The other three members may have different versions of this, but I know for myself that I spend a lot of time thinking, Next year I'm going to do this, and five years from now I'm going to do

ROSS MARINO/GETTY IMAGES

Metallica, (from left) Cliff Burton, Lars Ulrich, Kirk Hammett and James Hetfield during the Damage, Inc. Tour, Chicago, 1986

this. So, I spend a lot of time maneuvering around in the future. I'm happy to talk about the past and I'm happy to relive some of those things, but it's not something that I do unless prodded or encouraged.

WELL, I'M GOING TO PROD YOU A LITTLE BIT MORE. IN THE ALBUM ANNOUNCEMENT THAT WENT OUT, THERE'S A QUOTE FROM JAMES SAYING, "MUCH OF OUR ADULT EXPERIENCE IS REENACTMENT OR REACTION TO CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES, PRISONERS OF CHILDHOOD, OR BREAKING FREE OF THOSE BONDAGES WE CARRY." WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON THAT? Well, I think we all have our own versions of that. I don't want to speak for anybody else in the band, but James is going through a phase where I feel that he's very open and transparent about a lot of the stuff that he's been through. A lot of it's coming out in his lyrics, and I'm very supportive of him using the lyrics to communicate. But I don't want to put words in his mouth, obviously.

HOW DO YOU THINK HIS STATEMENT APPLIES TO YOU, THEN? There're certain things from my childhood that I still carry with me. I've talked openly about this, but I'm an only child. I've heard myself say 612,000 times that the reason I'm in a band is because I want to be around other people. I definitely was a bit of a loner when I was growing up, felt kind of ostracized, never felt like I was part of the big cool club, never felt like I was part of the center of attention. I was always sort of hovering outside. I was playing tennis, which is a solitary sport. You play against other people, but I spent a lot of time playing against the wall or with ball machines. I would bike myself to school rather than take the bus with other kids. So, being in a band, being in a group, being in a collective, being in a gang — whatever you want to call it — has always given me a sense of belonging.

I was an awkward, isolated, loner kid back in the day [who] jumped into a band environment. All the social elements came in the wake of that, whether it's meet-and-greets or always being around people or — back in the day — partying and all that type of stuff. Being around people that were like-minded and were all in their own way sort of disenfranchised misfits was like, "Wow, there's so many of us." It started in Southern California when we first formed the band with me and James and the few people that we played with very early on. Then, we moved to San Francisco and became part of the thrash scene up there. From there, we met more and more musicians and metal fans outside of the mainstream. Looking to connect with other people, that's definitely been my path. And that comes from being an only child. But everyone has their own version of that. I'm sure you have your own version.

IS IT SAFE TO SAY THAT THE LYRICS TO THE NEW SONGS ARE INVITING PEOPLE TO MAKE THEIR OWN INTERPRETATION? From the very beginning, I think the strength of James' lyrics is how it's always been about making up your own meaning, your own version. We're not being dictated to. And there's enough of an abstract

Metallica, (from left) Hammett, Hetfield, Ulrich and Robert Trujillo, 2023

wording in there for everybody to have their own version of what exactly these words and these songs mean. I don't think that that has changed over the years. When these songs come out, everybody will get a chance to dissect and decipher them, to embrace them and analyze them and everything else. Hopefully everyone will find their own version of what this means and create their own picture. I know James is certainly not more interested in explaining what the songs mean than he's been in the past — which, as you know, means he's not very interested in carving that out in stone. I can tell you that I'm certainly not going to try to carve it out in stone for anybody, either. I can just tell you what they mean to me.

ONE OF THE REASONS I WAS ASKING YOU ABOUT METALLICA'S ORIGINS EARLIER IS BECAUSE ON THE FIRST SINGLE, "LUX ÆTERNA," I CAN HEAR THE DIAMOND HEAD INFLUENCE IN THE RIFFS. THAT'S EVEN BEFORE JAMES DROPS THE LINE ABOUT "LIGHTNING THE NATION," WHICH IS AN OVERT NOD TO DIAMOND HEAD'S DEBUT ALBUM. I KNOW THEY WERE A KEY INFLUENCE ON YOU GUYS WHEN YOU STARTED THE BAND. WAS THERE A "LET'S GO BACK TO THE BEGINNING" MINDSET WITH THAT SONG? No, that's never the mindset. When we were writing what became "Lux Æterna," I don't think Diamond Head ever came up. But, obviously, yes, I did notice that he said, "lightning the nation" in the song. I don't really ask him about the lyrics, to be honest with you. But you know me well enough to know that when people go, "That sounds like NWOBHM" or "That sounds like Diamond Head" or whatever, I get it.

It's not like I'm puzzled by these comments. I just try to take a step back and enjoy the banter. I don't feel a need to be involved in the discussion, and I don't feel a need to try to, I guess, correct it. I don't want to get into an interview with *Revolver* and say, "No, no, no — hang on, Metallica fans. *This* is what it means, and *this* is how you should interpret it." As you get older, you're just less interested in trying to steer that dialogue. But if you wanna get technical about it, the riff is in the key of A, and a lot of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal songs were in A as well. But the majority of our songs are in either E or F-sharp. I hate breaking things down to that level, though.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE SECOND SINGLE, "SCREAMING SUICIDE." WHEN YOU GO TO WATCH THE VIDEO ON YOUTUBE, THERE'S A WARNING THAT SAYS, "THIS SONG TALKS ABOUT SELF-HARM," AND YOU HAVE TO CLICK AND AGREE THAT YOU'RE GOING TO WATCH IT ANYWAY. AND BELOW IT, THERE'S A SUICIDE HOTLINE NUMBER. AT WHAT POINT DID YOU HAVE A SENSE OF HOW THAT SONG WAS GOING TO BE PRESENTED? It's something that comes afterwards. When you're in the middle of creating something, you don't spend any time thinking about how it's going to be interpreted. But we made a choice, feeling that with this subject, this lyrical foundation, it would be helpful to package it with those disclaimers and that helpful information in there. And it was really, really emotional for me. I checked some of the comments a day or two after it came out, and to read

the feedback from the fans about how many people have been affected by this topic in their family, in their extended family, with their friends, was just mind-blowing. I was reading through the YouTube comments, and every third or fourth comment was somebody sharing a story about suicide or suicidal thoughts in somebody close to them. I was sitting with tears in my eyes reading this feedback.

I THINK THAT SPEAKS TO THE IMPACT METALLICA HAS HAD ON PEOPLE OVER THE YEARS. ON THAT TIP, NOT MANY GROUPS CAN PULL OFF THE KIND OF TOUR YOU'RE ABOUT TO EMBARK UPON — TWO NIGHTS IN EACH CITY, WITH DIFFERENT SET LISTS AND OPENING BANDS. We're definitely getting into something that we've never done before and nobody has really done before, so the blueprint for this is fairly nonexistent. But the idea of being able to take this whole thing one step further with different support acts on each night as we're playing different sets was more of a last-minute realization. I don't know exactly where it's going to land, but it's going to be exciting. And daunting. So, fucking wish us luck.

SOME OF THOSE SHOWS WILL BE WITH PANTERA. YOU'VE KNOWN THEM SINCE THEY WERE PLAYING CLUBS, BEFORE PHILIP ANSELMO WAS EVEN IN THE BAND, HAVEN'T YOU? We met the brothers [Dimebag and Vinnie Paul] on the *Ride the Lightning* tour and became friends with them. This was in Dallas in — what — 1622 or something? It was about 400 years ago. [*Laughs*] We obviously loved both of them, and they had a posse down there, and we would see them whenever we came through Texas. We watched the band evolve over the years from more rock vibes into that creative, unique force that they became. So, we've had a relationship with them for decades and decades, yeah.

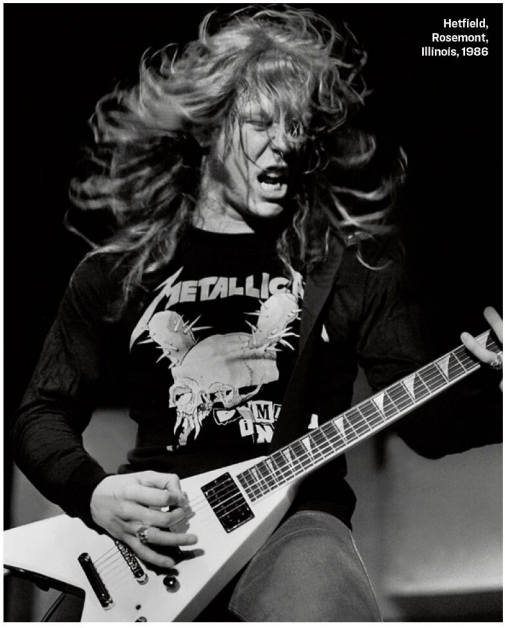
DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE PANTERA SONG? WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING THEM PLAY ON THIS TOUR? I haven't followed the setlist, but obviously "Walk" and the rest of the singles. I think that the idea that they're out celebrating the music and the magic of Pantera is … I know there's been a lot of talk in the community about whether people support that or not. But I'm the type of person, if Glenn Hughes wants to go out and play a Deep Purple set, I'd support that. I'm always in favor of people following their musical and creative ambitions; so this Pantera reunion, I think, is good. And obviously having Charlie [Benante] up there is great. I saw a video from one of the Mexico shows that felt like they were in the pocket. It'll be fun to have them out.

SPEAKING OF TOURING, THERE WAS THIS REALLY HEARTWARMING MOMENT YOU GUYS HAD ONSTAGE IN BRAZIL LAST YEAR, WHERE JAMES WAS TALKING BETWEEN SONGS AND HE WAS SAYING HE WAS HAVING A BAD DAY AND FEELING A LITTLE INSECURE, AND YOU GUYS ALL GAVE HIM A HUG. TELL ME ABOUT THAT MOMENT FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE. Hugging your fellow bandmates is definitely something that we do enjoy along the way. And being open about our love for each other and our appreciation for each other and how grateful we are

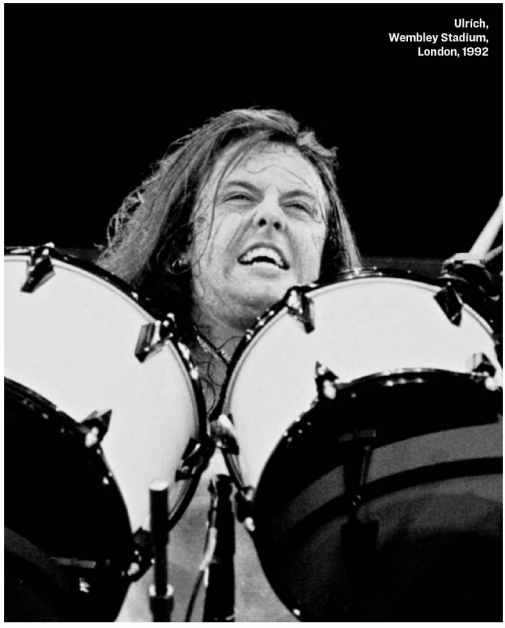
Metallica, Tokyo, 1986

KOH HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

"We try to be open and transparent with each other. That's in contrast to 30-something years ago when you were not allowed to have feelings because you were just a 20-year-old metal robot."
— Lars Ulrich



Hetfield, Rosemont, Illinois, 1986



Ulrich, Wembley Stadium, London, 1992

Metallica with Pantera's Dimebag Darrell (second from left) and Rex Brown (far right), Arlington, Texas, 1984

LEFT: PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT: DAVE BENETT/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM: STUART TAYLOR FRANK WHITE PHOTO AGENCY

that 40-plus-years later we can still stumble along and make it happen. We're very comfortable with that side. When you play these songs live and have these very rigid set lists, like, "OK, there's 16 songs and in this particular order," and everything's very scripted, our fans who know us well know that anytime there's a moment for something to happen impulsively, that's always something that we jump at.

But James was quite open about it earlier in the day. We try to check in with each other as much as we can on a daily basis. We try to be open and transparent with each other. That's in contrast to 30-something years ago when you were not allowed to have feelings because you were just a 20-year-old metal robot. Back then, the human element was sort of left by the wayside. When we would come offstage, we would argue: "You fucked that up." "No, I didn't fuck that up." It was just this crazy, inhuman striving for some sort of perfection that … I don't even know if it was achievable. But now, being comfortable with who we are in the aging process and all that stuff, you kind of go, "Haha, wasn't that really funny in that song when you fucked that up?" Now, we laugh and joke about it. We celebrate the human qualities in that, and the fact that we are people going up there every night just trying to do our best.

AS YOU KNOW, SLAYER RETIRED IN 2019. I KNOW THAT YOU GUYS HAVE BIG TOUR PLANS IN FRONT OF YOU FOR THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS, BUT DO YOU EVER THINK ABOUT METALLICA IN THOSE TERMS? IS THERE A CERTAIN BENCHMARK YOU'D WANT TO REACH BEFORE YOU MADE THAT DECISION?

It's not something we've talked a lot about, no. I think most of the energy and the resources go into trying to stay healthy, stay cohesive, stay functioning. As I get older, I spend more and more of my time on my daily workouts, on my cardio, on my strength training. I'm chained to my Peloton hours a day. It's all about trying to stay healthy: eating healthy, living healthy, whatever it is each of us need to bring to the table.

Obviously, there is a point where it's maybe not going to function anymore at some level, where we can't play "Battery" or "Master of Puppets" or songs like that. I know there's some people in the comments section that think that point has already come — and I appreciate that. [*Laughs*] But the only thing I can say is that it hasn't happened yet, knock on wood. Hopefully it won't happen for a while. I mean, McCartney's out there past his 80th birthday. The Stones are still out there. Springsteen just started his tour.

YEAH, BUT NONE OF THOSE DUDES ARE PLAYING ANYTHING EVEN *CLOSE* TO "BATTERY" TEMPO EVERY NIGHT… Right. But at the same time, Springsteen plays three-hour shows and just played 28 fucking songs on the opening night. He looks healthier and stronger than ever. But I appreciate what you're saying. None of them are playing "Battery." I would say if we stay healthy, hopefully we've got another decade. I mean, the second I'm done with you, I'm getting on the Peloton.

Metallica performing at Centre Videotron, Québec City, 2015

JIMMY HUBBARD

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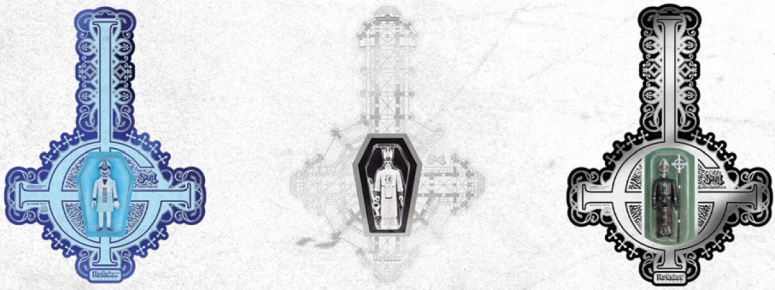

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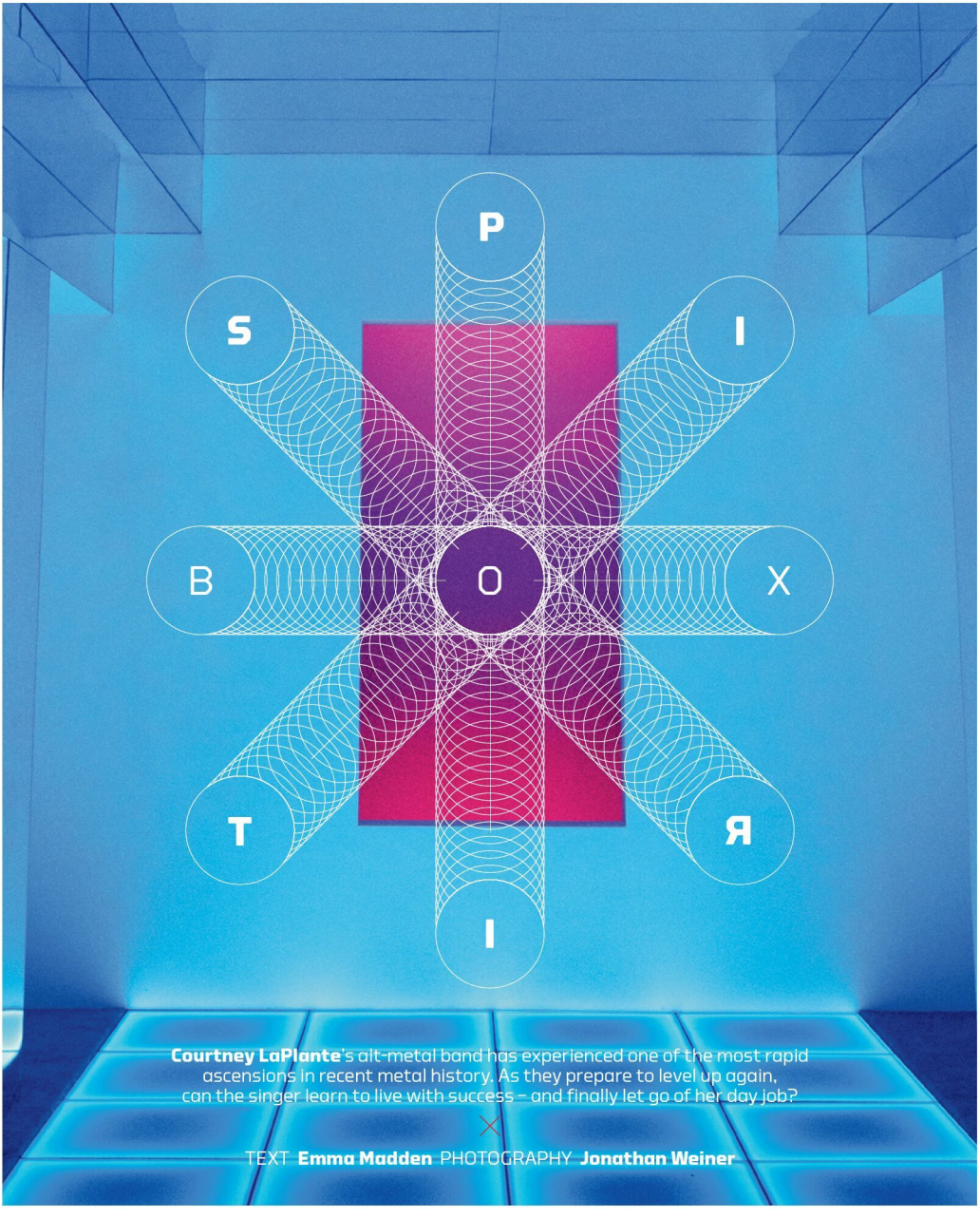

Courtney LaPlante's alt-metal band has experienced one of the most rapid ascensions in recent metal history. As they prepare to level up again, can the singer learn to live with success – and finally let go of her day job?

TEXT **Emma Madden** PHOTOGRAPHY **Jonathan Weiner**

COURTNEY LAPLANTE'S NIGHTMARE WOULD BE

SCREAMING ONE OF SPIRITBOX'S ALT-METAL songs in front of judge Simon Cowell and the crowd of normies at *America's Got Talent*. And yet last summer, Cowell, along with millions of viewers across America, was dramatically introduced to the intense sounds of Spiritbox — as LaPlante tuned in and cheered.

So how — in the infancy of their career, and after only one album — did this Canadian band from a small island in Victoria, British Columbia, manage to enter the small pantheon of metal acts who have had their mainstream crossover moment? And why was LaPlante so happy about it? It all began with a young girl's scream.

It was a Saturday in June 2022, the day *America's Got Talent* was due to air, and the day the world would witness the young screamer in question — 10-year-old Harper Jerret from Somerset, England — assault Cowell and the judges with her performance of Spiritbox's breakout hit "Holy Roller."

Everything appeared to align, like it was fated. LaPlante had previously befriended Jerret after discovering her on Instagram, and — on the exact night of the broadcast — Jerret found herself joining Spiritbox at their sold-out show in London to perform the very same banger from her *AGT* audition. As Jerret walked onstage, LaPlante imagined herself at that age: a timid child, years from realizing her identity as an artist, almost a decade out from finding her scream. "At her age I was just like, 'I love horses so much, they're so sick' and 'I wish *Space Jam* was real'," says the singer in her typically self-deprecating manner. (LaPlante is also prone to laughing at herself, which she does frequently, and infectiously, throughout our Zoom call.) "But I think she's a kid who's a bit ahead of the other kids, emotionally, because she's able to ask herself: Who am I? I *am* an artist."

LaPlante was immediately protective of that nascent determination. "Don't go near the front of the stage," she recalls telling Jerret, desperate to keep her safe — to make sure she wouldn't stray, to make sure she wouldn't fall. The duet came off without a hitch, but LaPlante was still a little apprehensive that night. She knew that within hours Jerret's *America's Got Talent* audition would air — to an audience that she suspected numbered in the metal-hating millions. LaPlante, quite sensibly, didn't trust Simon Cowell. She didn't trust the normies. She was expecting the worst.

Alongside her husband and bandmate Mike Stringer, LaPlante headed to her hotel room. They braced themselves for the audition and were prepared to talk shit about the judges. "We were ready to defend … like, 'Fuck you, Simon Cowell!'" she says. "Because we only have our own experience with normal culture and how they interact with what we do." Instead, as Jerret's performance unfolded, LaPlante watched with amazement as the judges' initial, terrified awe relaxed into total admiration.

"Holy roller sits in the garden we fled/Blood into wine, take my body instead," Jerret enunciated like a tiny Shakespearean thespian, before launching into a LaPlante-worthy scream that was all animal, that obliterated all boundaries of prime-time decorum. A standing ovation. A thumbs up from Simon Cowell. Three yeses. LaPlante cheered for Jerret — and then sat up and took note. This is what happens when you don't take away a little girl's freedom to scream. This is what happens when you imagine the world as a stage from which to shout unashamed.

"It was amazing to see that girls can make this kind of music," Jerret recently told *Revolver* of first discovering LaPlante's performance on "Holy Roller," which her stepfather had introduced her to around the time Spiritbox released their 2021 full-length debut, *Eternal Blue*. "I was really inspired by Courtney to start screaming and making my own music." The song was Jerret's introduction to metal, her gateway into the genre. "Holy Roller" has now become, for an increasing number of kids across the world, their gateway, too.

It was a surreal moment that garlanded one of the most rapid ascensions in recent metal history. Watchful eyes have been placed on Spiritbox ever since their inception in 2017. But it wasn't until July 2020 — when they released "Holy Roller," the first single from *Eternal Blue* — that they turned from a niche one-to-watch act to one of metal's most exciting new prospects. They soon secured a No. 1 spot on SiriusXM's Liquid Metal radio station as well as a significant, devoted fanbase — and for good reasons. Spiritbox were expanding the genre in both sound and scope, incorporating djent blasts and industrial breakbeats into hypnagogic dreamscapes while broadening metal's emotional range beyond brazen anguish and rage.

On this point, LaPlante is especially passionate. "I feel like we're one of the only remaining genres that has to be so binary in what the music is about and how the music makes you feel," she says. "Other music has a wide scope: songs about partying, songs about heartbreak, songs about being angry, songs about feeling depressed, songs about feeling happy. [Metal] is a broad genre, but a lot of it feels like it's on autopilot."

If the success of "Holy Roller" wasn't enough of a tell, by the time *Eternal Blue* dropped in September 2021 it was crystal clear: Spiritbox were on the rise — and steering their own plane. The record debuted at No. 13 on the *Billboard* 200, marking that year's highest-charting release for the genre at that point. Incessant, relentless touring followed, as they supported many of hard rock's legacy acts and gained swathes of new fans from devotees of Ghost, Underoath, Bring Me the Horizon, even Limp Bizkit. Every metric and data point suggest it: Spiritbox are *big*. Their influence has both pushed the genre forward and opened it up to a new generation. All at once, everything has changed — and yet everything still remains the same. This is Spiritbox's strange new reality.

When LaPlante logs into our video call, the singer is once again sitting in front of the exact same setup

PHOTOGRAPHER ASSISTANT: KEANU PAGANO; MAKEUP: CHRISTINA GUERRA; HAIR: NATALIE JEAN

"DOES THAT SECURE FEELING EVER COME, OR DOES IT FEEL LIKE THIS FOREVER? BECAUSE I STILL FEEL MUCH CLOSER TO MY OFFICE JOB THAN TO BEING IN SLIPKNOT." – COURTNEY LAPLANTE

"For over 10 years, I've been pursuing this crazy dream. Whether people supported it or not, they didn't understand. Like, 'Why are you spending all your money recording songs?' When you say it out loud, you're like, Yeah, am I insane?" — LaPlante

from which I interviewed her for a *Revolver* "Uprising" profile just over two years ago. A weak-tea-colored wall is behind her, precariously nailed to which is a black-and-purple Spiritbox poster that she and Stringer designed together over five years ago. But some things are different: A few empty moving boxes can be seen in the background — as soon, the band will be splitting their time between Victoria and Los Angeles. It's purely a business decision; the cost of an apartment is cheaper than all the hotel stays they've splurged on while travelling down to California to record. "When I go away from my island, go to L.A., Michael and I get very shocked," she says. "It's absolutely bizarre for us. I think being here has kind of protected us, sheltered us. It's a literal and figurative island for us."

Again: everything is changing and yet everything remains the same. LaPlante and Stringer still work the same data-entry job they were at before Spiritbox took off. Well, sort of. "Work" is putting it generously. Although they are still, technically, employees of the company, LaPlante's forgotten her log-in password, which means she can't make a formal resignation even if she wanted to — and neither of them have worked a shift there in over two years. "It's kind of sick and twisted that I haven't quit. I think it's a weird motivating thing," says LaPlante. "I keep it because I wanna remind myself that I might very easily have to go back to doing something I don't like, and that it's a huge privilege I get to do something I do like."

LaPlante also reveals that she continues to feel further and further away from the person she was before she was "Courtney LaPlante," leader of Spiritbox and full-time professional musician. This, in her mind, is a dangerous state to be in. She is financially secure for the first time in her adult life, but she considers that security a misnomer. She constantly must remind herself of the professional musician's precarious state. "To other artists who have been around longer: Does that secure feeling ever come to you, or does it feel like this forever?" she wonders. "Because I still feel much closer to my office job than to, like, being in Slipknot."

LaPlante speaks at length about the financial reality of being in a band, a reality that has been romanticized, and that she wishes to demystify. She's long been curious about the ways in which audiences fetishize artists and view them as a pure commodity and not as workers like the rest of us. She considers it one of metal's last remaining taboos.

"I'm 33 and I've been gambling my whole life in hopes that this pays off," says the singer, who prior to forming Spiritbox was, along with Stringer, a member of metalcore outfit Iwrestledabearonce. "But I know the reality ... If people knew how non-lucrative this world is and how little money most bands make, they'd probably be more likely to buy an extra shirt. One time I saw a Reddit thread saying, 'Oh my god these people have jobs?! ... They have 700,000 monthly listeners.' And I was like, that's not paying anyone's bills."

For the sake of her fans, her dreams, her bank account — LaPlante is focused on making sure that Spiritbox are continually scaling up, thinking bigger. She owes it to herself. For the entirety of her adult life, up until now, LaPlante has been looked at as though she's been in a perpetual state of delusion. "For over 10 years, I've been pursuing this crazy dream," she says.

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"And whether people supported it or not, they didn't really understand — because it's such a strange thing to want to do. Like, 'Why are you spending all your money recording songs that no one wants to hear?' It's hard to explain to people because it is extremely irrational. When you say it out loud, you're like, Yeah, why *am* I doing this? Am I insane?"

Turns out the dream wasn't so crazy after all. Courtney LaPlante, certified not insane. The sold-out shows for Spiritbox's upcoming headlining tour, alone, prove that. For the first half of this year — and for the first time ever — Spiritbox won't be playing within the parameters of another band. This is their live show, their production. "We really wanna ramp it up, invest in it, blow everyone's minds. I want everyone to walk away saying, 'I wanna see that band again — and in a bigger place.' That's my dream. Now I'm like, OK, how am I gonna impress these people?"

Performing is LaPlante's stimulant, though it's not without its occasional comedowns. Having played only a little over a hundred shows, she's yet to get into her groove. Every night is a test. "I still have a lot to learn about performing. The whole time I'm thinking, How's Michael doing? Is his guitar sounding good? OK, that light worked. This part worked," she says. "It's weird; it's like that combined with an out-of-body experience. Meanwhile, I'm singing about being depressed. Most of my songs are about me having dark feelings and my struggle with depression and just feeling all the strong feelings I've had throughout my life. It's both extremely emotionally therapeutic and also literally performative at the same time."

If 2022 whipped them into becoming a good band, 2023 will be the year that ensures Spiritbox's enduring greatness. "I'm really excited, but it is gonna be really hard," says LaPlante. "We love to sabotage ourselves. So we're like, Hey, let's throw in writing new music, too — and hopefully we'll get some new music out in the first half of the year. After that we're gonna hibernate and hopefully write an album. That's the goal. Crazy first half of the year, pretty chill second half."

Spiritbox began writing new material in November of last year. "Now we have to figure out when do we show you the songs? Do we show you in March? Do we show you in September? Or do we wait until 2024? I don't know." Sooner sounds more likely than later. LaPlante hates sitting on new music. "We wrote this music because we really wanna share it with you," she says. "It made us feel a certain way and we wanna see if it makes you feel a certain way, too."

Still, the songs keep piling up. LaPlante doesn't reveal much about the new music, not out of preciousness, but simply because she's yet to find the right words to describe it. She mentions repeated phrases and themes throughout the songs: mental prisons, body horror, visual illusions, disillusionment — all material she believes she could fit into a concept album or EP. "To me, all these songs are one big song lyrically and thematically," she says. "If everything aligns and we feel really strongly that everything hits exactly how we want — the art and the music and the whole thing around it — we'll want to put this out as soon as possible. If we do our job right, then we will."

Carrying that young girl's yell of fearlessness with her, LaPlante is pushing both herself and an entire genre forward.

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BAD

Noah Sebastian's chaotic childhood ignited a fire inside him, one that's driven him to the brink of major stardom. So why is he urging fans to "not make me or Bad Omens your life"?

TEXT **Eli Enis**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Bryan Kirks**

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IF YOU DON'T KNOW THE NAME BAD OMENS, THEN you're probably not on TikTok. A clip of their song "Just Pretend" has been used in nearly 70 thousand videos on the Gen-Z-dominated video app, where creators use the song's stinging lyrics — "I can wait for you at the bottom/I can stay away if you want me to" — to demonstrate the emotional nuance of metal, arguing that the often-derided form of aggressive music is more than just mush-mouthed screaming and glorifications of senseless violence. It's real. Multidimensional. Human. Everything Bad Omens frontman-songwriter-mastermind Noah Sebastian thinks social media is not.

"It's like the opposite of virtual reality: I have a body just so I can take a photo of it and put it on the internet and exist there," he muses of the digital realm's perverse draw. "That's why I try to go outside more now. And wrestle."

Today, you're more likely to find the 27-year-old sparring with his opponents in jiu-jitsu or Muay Thai than typing out personal updates on Instagram. But Sebastian generously granted *Revolver* some rare screen time. He's speaking over Zoom in January 2023, seated in his studio room at his house in Los Angeles, where he's lived for the last seven years with a handful of friends including Bad Omens guitarist and co-conspirator Joakim "Jolly" Karlsson. It's been about a month since Bad Omens completed their first-ever U.S. headlining tour, in which every date was sold out. In less than a month, they'll trek across the pond for the European iteration, also sold out in its entirety.

"A lot of people that tried to doubt us or question us will attribute [our success] to TikTok," Sebastian says of their ballooning popularity on the app in late 2022. "But that [U.S.] tour was 80 percent sold out *before* 'Just Pretend' hit TikTok."

While that one song's explosive popularity made them look like an overnight sensation to some, the rise of Bad Omens has been a slow burn. In February 2022, they released their third album, *The Death of Peace of Mind*, a uniquely gauzy, gutsy, extremely catchy opus that's more alt-metal than metalcore; its sonic palette evokes the hue of a bedside candle flickering in the shadows, not the incinerating blaze of a wild mosh pit. Drawing influence from the Weeknd's sunken-eyed R&B and HEALTH's blazing-furnace industrial metal, the record didn't move mountains out of the gate. But by the end of 2022, it was being spoken of as a landmark metalcore achievement — a watershed moment in the genre that catapulted Bad Omens into the rock crossover realms they'd always hoped of reaching.

"I want my mom to be able to listen to [us] and say, 'This is actually really good,' even though it's hard music," Karlsson beams during a separate chat, shameless in his desire to transcend metalcore's ceiling.

The band didn't feel the effects all at once. But after what Sebastian describes as "crushing" their opening slots on tours with Underoath, In This Moment and A Day to Remember, Bad Omens finished the year as a headlining act with a viral internet storm behind them thanks to "Just Pretend." Naturally, Sebastian is still catching his breath from the whirlwind ride.

"We've always kind of had a trajectory of going up," Sebastian says of their steady career climb in the latter half of the 2010s. "With *The Death of Peace of Mind*, it just skipped ahead like three or four years."

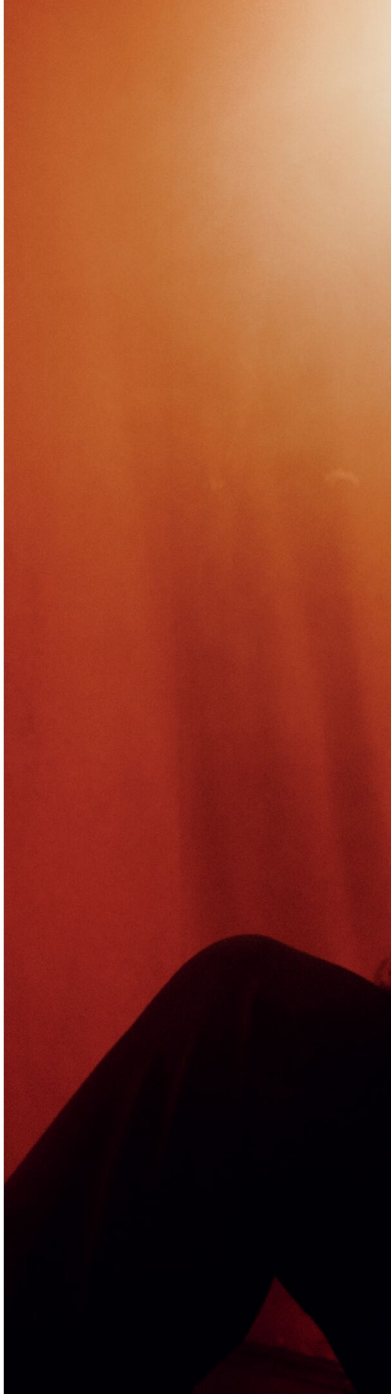
The fact that Sebastian, and likewise Bad Omens, have gotten to this point at all is remarkable. The odds were stacked against the musician since he was a kid. "I had a pretty unorthodox childhood and upbringing," Sebastian quips with a sheepish smirk. "Pretty dysfunctional. I don't know how I came out this well adjusted."

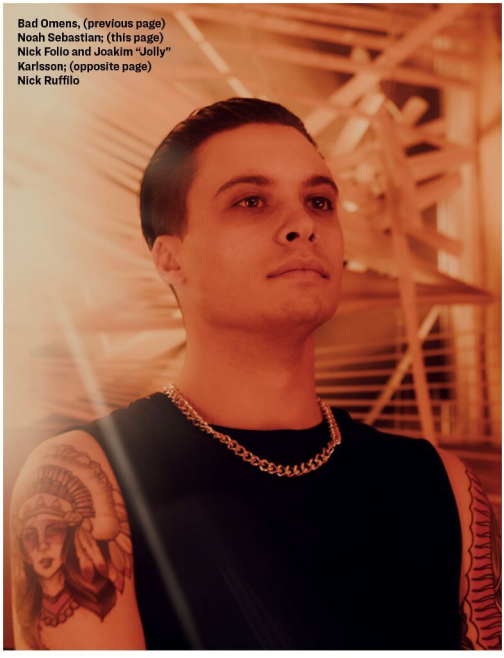
The singer grew up in Richmond, Virginia, splitting time between the homes, and "opposite lifestyles," of his mother and his grandparents. His "traditional Virginia grandparents" were conservative churchgoers who ran a tight ship and enforced order and discipline on Sebastian. His grandpa was the only father figure in his life. His mother, on the other hand, would let him run wild without any guidance.

"We had a bad relationship," Sebastian says of he and his mom, who's now deceased. But he's grateful that she bestowed him with a solid value system of love and respect for other cultures, sexualities and races.

Shortly after his grandfather passed, Sebastian dropped out of high school and left home at age 15, ending his formal education before 10th grade. He moved in with various older friends and kicked around Richmond as a precocious musician who behaved inordinately mature for his age. Unlike the trope of the doomed, drug-addled teenage runaway, Sebastian, thankfully, never found himself in any real danger and never succumbed to a lifestyle of adolescent debauchery. "I was surprisingly balanced for someone that didn't have any structure," he says, noting that he barely drank as a kid and has still never tried hard drugs in his life.

Hearing him speak plainly about his unconventional youth is unexpected and refreshing. Sebastian is an incredibly composed and well-spoken conversationalist. He chooses his words carefully, and carries himself with a cool, non-threatening confidence. He also has an extensive and multifaceted musical vocabulary — writing, producing, branding, live sound and business management are among his specialties. His rigorous dedication to every facet of Bad Omens is impressive, and he credits his grandparents with instilling in him the work ethic that's carried him from teenage runaway to budding rock star.





Bad Omens, (previous page) Noah Sebastian; (this page) Nick Folio and Joakim "Jolly" Karlsson; (opposite page) Nick Ruffilo

"Music is a very oversaturated, competitive business to try to make a career out of," he says. "I don't think I would've been able to do it without the aptitude to kill myself [working hard] every day mentally, and sometimes physically, doing things that needed to be done while starting the band."

Sebastian has possessed that same level of intense determination since he was a preteen. He joined a local "Enter Shikari worship" band at the tender age of 12, lying about his age to get in. More than just a player and fan of music — Eminem, Fall Out Boy, Disturbed and the Weeknd were among his teenage favorites — Sebastian was a detailed observer of how musicians operated their projects. When he learned that Beartooth mastermind Caleb Shomo and the Plot in You's Landon Tewers not only wrote all of their bands' songs, but self-produced their own records, something clicked. "I didn't know you could do that," Sebastian remembers thinking. Transfixed, he began training himself to record and produce music at age 16, and within a year he quit the dead-end local band he was in to forge his own solo project, soon to be titled Bad Omens.

Up until this point, Sebastian had only ever played guitar in other bands. He sang with his grandfather in church choir as a child, but never attempted to croon or scream in a rock or metal setting. At the beginning, Bad Omens (originally titled Man Vs. Self) was essentially a test lab for Sebastian to experiment with songwriting, singing and self-producing. He didn't necessarily have his sights set on stardom from the get-go, but the opportunity swiftly arose when the five-song demo he made in his bedroom ended up in the hands of Sumerian Records. Before Bad Omens had ever played a show, or even had a lineup solidified, the band was offered a record deal that would give Sebastian a shot at the legitimate music career of his dreams — and he took it. As a 17-year-old with no high-school degree and very little money, he knew that professionalizing the band that early in the game was his only ticket to making his music more than a hobby.

"There was no way I could afford to do the whole DIY touring grind, getting in a van and playing shows for 20 people for five years," he says. "I was really living paycheck to paycheck at the time."

In short order, Sebastian turned his one-man venture into a full-band affair, recruiting a handful of local musicians to fill out the initial lineup: rhythm guitarist Nick Ruffilo, bassist Vincent Riquier and drummer Nick Folio. Riquier recommended that Sebastian audition Karlsson for the lead guitarist position, specifically because the Swedish rocker came equipped with valuable songwriting and touring experience, having gigged internationally with his relatively notable previous band, Her Bright Skies. In early 2015, the newly assembled five-piece spent a month writing and demoing songs in a Maryland basement before heading into the studio to record their debut album, 2016's *Bad Omens*, with bigwig metalcore producer Will Putney. It was pretty typical of how rock bands build their albums, but it's the last time they'll ever go that route.

"I'm not as happy as I should be about everything happening and the success — just all the good things. It's probably some deep-rooted shit from my childhood. I'm terrified it's all temporary."
— Noah Sebastian

Not that they were necessarily unhappy with the final result, but the whole process of writing in a practice space environment and then bringing the songs to life with an outside producer felt inauthentic to Sebastian, who was then, and still remains, Bad Omens' principal writer and director. Sonically, their debut is their most down-the-middle metalcore record, and while he doesn't regret its existence, Sebastian cringes at how he leaned so heavily on the "pitched scream" vocal delivery, which earned the band a boatload of flack for sounding reminiscent of Bring Me the Horizon.

"I was the vocalist of the band, but I was not a confident singer whatsoever," Sebastian admits, explaining that he was trying to mask his voice in tattered yelps instead of unleashing the haunting purrs and electric belts that crown the band's more recent output.

Ironically, taking the band back to the bedroom is how Bad Omens achieved their current headliner status. For their last two records, 2019's *Finding God Before God Finds Me* and *The Death of Peace of Mind*, Sebastian and Karlsson wrote, recorded and produced everything at home besides the drums, which they tracked separately in a rented studio. This method has given the detail-oriented Sebastian more control over the final product, allowing him to put to use the "thousands of hours" he's spent consuming production tutorials on YouTube.

Billie Eilish is probably not the musician you'd expect a metal band like Bad Omens to draw inspiration from. However, Sebastian looks to Eilish and her brother Finneas' intimate home-studio camaraderie — revolutionary for a popstar of her caliber — as the model for his music-making partnership with Karlsson. "When we were making *The Death of Peace of Mind*, [Billie and Finneas] validated my belief that we were doing it right," he says.

While *Finding God* moved closer to the R&B-influenced direction Bad Omens fully embraced on *Peace of Mind*, Sebastian says the band's sophomore LP was "painful to make." Stressed by the pressure to follow-up their well-liked debut, he and Karlsson would spend weeks tinkering with a single part and then ultimately revert back to the first draft. For *The Death of Peace of Mind*, they canned the overly methodical song structures and just wrote where their hearts took them, tapping into what Sebastian describes as the "childlike approach" of making music without any self-conscious rules or limitations.

Before anyone else had even heard the record, Bad Omens already considered it a smash success. "I realized that I was so proud of it that I didn't care if other people got it," Sebastian recalls. For bands who make their bones in the scream-and-breakdown-addled world of metalcore, pivoting to catchier, cleaner soundscapes always comes with the risk of isolating longtime fans. Save for heavy outliers like "Artificial Suicide," *The Death of Peace of Mind* is not just more melodic than their previous records, but a complete textural overhaul; "seedy," "dark," "sensual" and

"I've always felt like I had something to prove. I've always been a little arrogant and even condescending at times. But with *The Death of Peace of Mind*, I feel like I proved everything to myself I had to prove."
— Sebastian

even "sexy" are adjectives Sebastian uses to describe its sonic aesthetic — words no one would associate with metalcore traditionalists like Killswitch Engage or August Burns Red.

"My favorite thing [about the album] is I think it's commercialized in a way that I'm still proud of," Karlsson enthuses. "Because sometimes when you commercialize an album, you kind of destroy it. You kind of suck the soul out of it a little bit."

If anything, *The Death of Peace of Mind* brought Sebastian closer with his inner self. He admits that he used to struggle with an inflated ego, but in making a record that lives up to his own sky-high standards, he's been able to quell that side of him. "I've always kind of felt like I had something to prove," he says with a pensive honesty. "I've always been a little arrogant and even condescending at times. But with *The Death of Peace of Mind*, I feel like I proved everything to myself I had to prove."

Therefore, on the one hand, there's irony in the title, *The Death of Peace of Mind*. But in another sense, that motif of losing one's internal serenity was eerily prescient for what would happen once the album rocketed Bad Omens to the forefront of their genre. It's not the physical rigors of the road, inflated industry pressures or more demanding schedule that've thrown him off balance. It's the increased visibility of his personhood.

"I feel like I'm not as happy as I should be about everything happening and the success — just all the good things," Sebastian vents, steering the talk of triumph into a deluge of pent-up frustrations. "It's probably some deep-rooted shit from my childhood or something. It just feels like I'm terrified it's all temporary."

Social media has been the main source of his ire. As Bad Omens' fan presence on TikTok grows and videos of him performing or just existing in public have made him into a minor celebrity, Sebastian has sought comfort in privacy. He's almost completely stopped posting on his personal accounts and he's extremely selective about the interviews he does. Now, his silence has become a strategy.

"People give too much away," he offers. "I'm tired of saying things, honestly. When you don't say anything at all and then the quiet guy in the room finally says something, people listen."

Except in some cases, the silence makes people think it's time to play pretend interpreter. "I will go into it, I don't care," he snips when asked about fans' misguided invasions of his privacy. Exasperated, he visibly drops his guard and lets his unspoken grievances pour out.

Sebastian describes numerous situations where Bad Omens fans have used social media to make up stories about him, or, even weirder, fabricate quotes in his name to speak *for* him in a bizarre act of parasocial loyalty. On last year's headlining tour, Sebastian felt like he "lost control of my likeness" and began doing little social experiments at every show, betting friends that if he said a specific phrase onstage or walked to the bus at a certain time at night, then some half-truth about the experience would be on TikTok the next day, fueling this fan-constructed version of Noah Sebastian that's increasingly detached from the real guy.

"It turned into almost a little game, but it was not a nice game," says Sebastian, frowning. "It was me just proving to myself how disappointed I am in social media's influence on people."

Seeking therapy has helped keep him grounded and clear in his unflinching vision, and the confidence he has in Bad Omens. As their presence grows and the expectations to concede to industry standards mount up, Sebastian finds gleeful solace in exercising power over the one thing he can control — the music.

"I know we live in this instant-gratification world where it's singles-based and every day someone drops a new song or something," he says of the TikTok-era music landscape. "I don't care. If anything, I'm kind of realizing, like, 'OK, what's every other band doing? We should not do that.' Because that's been working great for us the past year and a half."

In an era when bands are expected to market themselves as lifestyles, and particularly for a band who've seen so much success on social media, Sebastian continues to buck conventional brand-building wisdom. He's immensely grateful for his fans and he has dreams of selling out arenas. But once those screaming faces step outside the venue, he politely asks for his own peace of mind.

"Don't make me or Bad Omens your life. Please." R

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FOX LAKE - VIOLENT NEW BREED - DARK SIGNAL - LONEWOLF - SID STRATTON - DVLSNV - SOUTHBOUND BERETTA - BITTERSWEET REVENGE

SATURDAY

PANTERA

LAMB OF GOD - IN THIS MOMENT - MOTIONLESS IN WHITE - UNDEROATH

THE GHOST INSIDE - MEMPHIS MAY FIRE - SLAUGHTER TO PREVAIL - MUSHROOMHEAD

MAYLENE AND THE SONS OF DISASTER - FIRE FROM THE GODS - THE VIOLENT - VARIALS - WOE, IS ME - LIKE MOTHS TO FLAMES

UNCURED - HEARTSICK - ASAVA - SET FOR TOMORROW - FIGHT FROM WITHIN - HALF HEARD VOICES - HARMLESS HABIT - GHOSTATIC

SLIPKNOT

SUNDAY

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WAGE WAR - GWAR - CROWN THE EMPIRE - 10 YEARS - FAME ON FIRE

DAYSEEKER - GIDEON - EVA UNDER FIRE - SLAY SQUAD - LAST OF OUR KIND - CLIFFORD

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DEZ FAFARA

In 2021, the Coal Chamber and DevilDriver frontman nearly died from COVID. Now fully recovered, he's determined to "take it all on," from new music and reunion tours to book deals and more. Here, Fafara leads us through his loco life.

TEXT **Gregory Adams**

WITHOUT QUESTION, DEZ FAFARA IS A BUSY GUY. WHEN *REVOLVER* CONNECTS with the Coal Chamber and DevilDriver frontman, he explains he's been up since 4:30 a.m. — like most days — working out business details for the roster of bands he manages, including Exodus, Cradle of Filth and Jinjer, through the Oracle Management company he runs with his wife, Anahstasia. He's also been readying a deal to bring his SunCult line of surfwear into Tillys department stores. Back in the metal realm, DevilDriver is gearing up for the spring release of their bombastic *Dealing With Demons II*, while the reformed Coal Chamber are about to hit stages for the first time in eight years. Oh, and he's got a two-volume autobiography coming out soon, too.

"I've got a lot of stuff going on," the multitasker admits, before imparting some sage advice. "Here's the thing: Take it all on, because one day you're going to be in a hospital bed, and you're going to wish that you didn't fuck off a big opportunity to just stay home. Take advantage of the minutes and hours you're given, because we don't know when the clock is up."

While optimistic in scope, his outlook also comes from a place of unfortunate experience. Fafara has seized the day his whole life through — from building skateboard ramps as an energetic youth; to law-defying, late-night postering runs at the start of Coal Chamber; to his current wave of empire-building plans — but the past few years have, understandably, ground everything to a halt. Naturally, the pandemic pulled DevilDriver off the road, and left the band unable to promote 2020's *Dealing With Demons I*. Then, Fafara came down with a nearly fatal bout of coronavirus in the fall of 2021.

"I almost died from COVID, so I had to take this [past] year off to heal my heart," he says, the statement landing in a literal sense — while perhaps also alluding to the mending of fences within the Coal Chamber camp, and the reflective tack of *Dealing With Demons II*.

Coal Chamber's initial late-Nineties/early-Aughts run delivered blessedly unhinged nu-metal anthems like "Loco," but those highs were also clouded by drug use and onstage fisticuffs. As they've matured, and "got their shit together," Coal Chamber now seem to have learned how to conjure aural chaos without inciting interpersonal calamity.

Dealing With Demons II, meanwhile, finds a contemplative Fafara delivering rage-intensified lyrics on betrayal and broken relationships. As he looked back on an extraordinary life through the autobiography project — which begins this year with *Loco: Chaos, Calamity and Coal Chamber* — he also managed to work out his demons through DevilDriver. "This is my last record where I'm poignantly against the human race, like, 'Hey, I'm talking about you, here, motherfucker!'" Fafara exclaims. "My next stuff is actually on an unbelievable spiritual level. It's completely different than anything I've ever written... beyond optimistic."

Ahead of *Dealing With Demons II*, Coal Chamber's much-anticipated reunion dates and the publication of *Loco*, Fafara filled us in on his crazy life.

HOW NOSTALGIC OR REFLECTIVE OF A PERSON WERE YOU PRIOR TO TAKING ON THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY PROJECT?

DEZ FAFARA Not one bit. There's that old saying: If you don't know your past, you don't know your future. Fucking wrong! The minute you start looking back, it's almost impossible to start to move forward. I took no time to look back until Anahstasia got me a two-book deal: The first one is my life when I was young through Coal Chamber, and the next one is the DevilDriver years.

It was an incredible process to speak to a co-writer [*author Joel McIver*], extremely reflective. A couple times, I had tears in my eyes. That doesn't come easy for me. I also got pissed about a few things. There'll be some insane revelations within that book that obviously I'm not going to give up to you right now... But people are going to get an honest, open look at who Bradley James Fafara is. I think they deserve that.

Look, it's hard enough for a band to have two years of a career ... I've been in it since almost 1993-94, and I say that meaning label interest and signing deals. Before that I was a drummer in a psychobilly band called the Screaming Wolves. I'm a psychobilly, punk rock, gothic club kid way the fuck before I'm a metal guy. The only reason I went into metal is because it was vicious, and punk rock was starting to become blink-182. I found somebody in [Miguel] Meegs [Rascón], my guitar player from Coal Chamber, that loved Sisters of Mercy as much as he loved Motörhead and White Zombie. So, we clicked.

OPENING SPREAD: CHELSEA LAUREN/WIREIMAGE; THIS PAGE: MIKKA SKAFFARI/FILMMAGIC

"DevilDriver completely blanks me out to the point where if I'm onstage and a guy comes up to hug me, I could kill you and not remember it. In Coal Chamber, I'm just as vicious, but I'm in a weirder headspace."
— Dez Fafara

HAD THIS LATEST COAL CHAMBER REUNION BEEN PERCOLATING IN THE BACKGROUND FOR AWHILE? Nobody was talking about it or thinking about it, but my wife actually reached out to them [when I was sick] and said, "My husband, my best friend, could possibly be on his deathbed with COVID. We just had antibody shots in his stomach; he's starting Ivermectin. We're hoping he comes out of this." I had to live downstairs in my house for seven months because I couldn't make it up my stairs. If you've ever seen me onstage … think about that guy, and then think about the guy who can't even make it up his fucking stairs because his heart is giving him so many problems after COVID.

The band started texting me on a daily basis. I think it was Meegs that said, "Fuck, I'd love to do a show with you, bro. I love you." I said, "You know what, love is the law. So, we gotta let everything go… But the way it's going to go, I'm not going to talk one bit of business with you. My wife runs the show. She's the manager." I'd done all the business for Coal Chamber: I booked [shows]; I wrote the lyrics; I got the tours; I dealt with the agents and managers — and it became too much for me at that point in my life. I just wanted to be a singer.

COAL CHAMBER FIRST PLAYED THE SUNSET STRIP IN THE EARLY NINETIES. THIS WAS AFTER HAIR METAL, DURING GRUNGE, AND NU-METAL WAS RISING. WHAT WAS THE SCENE LIKE AT THE WHISKY AND THE TROUBADOUR BACK THEN? Coal Chamber came out as a band called She's in Pain, and that was 1990-93. Our first show as Coal Chamber was in '93. The [Strip] was completely dead. The hair scene had completely killed everything, and when grunge came in … really, the Sunset Strip didn't give a fuck. I never went to clubs in L.A. during that heyday of Pearl Jam, Nirvana and Hole … and I never saw people running around with flannels on in L.A.

But there was a very small band from Huntington Beach called Korn that would bus people up to their shows in L.A. The scene went from hair metal to this weird conglomeration of Coal Chamber, Static-X, System of a Down, Korn and Deftones. So, I think L.A. went through growing pains after the hair-metal thing, and probably said to the masses, "The next scene we pick up on in L.A. is going to be weird, diverse and cool." And that scene became nu-metal.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THOSE EARLY DAYS? I remember getting in a big white van with five-gallon buckets of paste, big paint brushes, and 5-by-20 posters. We would roll up and down Sunset and Melrose, and we would cover all the movie posters. *Terminator 2?* Cover it! We would go home to shower and barely be able to take that shit off our hands. We would put up 250 posters in a night, so much so that I had the cops call my house and say, "If you do this again, we're going to come to your house and arrest you." I'd say, "You don't know where I live," and hang up on them. I was stupid. Of course they knew where the fuck I live. They're the LAPD.

THE FIRST VOLUME OF YOUR AUTOBIOGRAPHY IS ENTITLED *LOCO*, AFTER THE FIRST TRACK AND SINGLE FROM COAL CHAMBER'S DEBUT. WHAT DOES THIS SONG REPRESENT TO YOU IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF YOUR CAREER? We were playing the Whisky and [most] of the crowd would be what was called the South Gate Crew, a Hispanic crew that if you fucked with 'em, you'd end up with a broken nose and no teeth. We had violent shows in the beginning. So, "Loco" mostly represents the culture that came to support us the most. We wanted to give back to them. That song's what broke us open.

THE VIDEO FOR "LOCO" AND THE *COAL CHAMBER* ALBUM COVER BOTH FEATURED THAT NOW-ICONIC ICE-CREAM TRUCK. WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THAT? That was actually a guy that cruised around my [neighborhood] all the time. Me and Meegs used to run out of my little one-bedroom apartment and grab an ice-cream cone, and we got to know the guy. He allowed us to use it. He was just a really cool old man, and said, "Don't mess up my decals; don't spray-paint anything on the truck." This is actually the truck that cruises around as we're writing music [for the first album].

HOW MANY OF YOU LIVED TOGETHER AT THE TIME? All of us! I had a tiny, 600-square-foot apartment in Hollywood. Meegs ended up moving in; [bassist] Rayna [Foss] ended up living in the kitchen area. And then [drummer] Mikey [Cox] actually started staying with us, too. … He was 17 when he joined the band. He did an interview for the book, and coming from the eyes of a 17-year-old, it was a culture shock. We were all living in that apartment at the time, trading Top Ramen and going out every single night with backpacks of tapes. We would just give away 50 cassette tapes a night. We were our own street team.

COAL CHAMBER SURPRISED FANS WHEN YOU ANNOUNCED THE FIRST REUNION SHOW AT THE SICK NEW WORLD FESTIVAL WITH SYSTEM OF A DOWN, KORN AND MANY OTHERS. A SECOND SHOW WAS JUST BOOKED AT THE BLUE RIDGE ROCK FESTIVAL. ARE YOU PLANNING MORE GIGS FOR 2023? We are! Of course. Here's the thing: I cannot see how we can fight now. They're off drugs. I'm open to being less private, and I don't handle any of the business anymore. There's no real way we can get at each other's throats. It's not like, "Bro, you're trying to fuck my girlfriend," or, "Where's my drugs?" There's none of those conversations to be had.

IF CHAOS HAD INFORMED THE BEGINNING OF THE BAND, WHAT WILL COAL CHAMBER BE LIKE WITHOUT IT? First of all, from the first note of rehearsal it's chaos. From the first minute [we'll be] onstage, it'll be aggressive, all-out bash time. I won't go onstage if I can't be that way. So, the chaos is there [in the music], but the chaos behind the scenes is not. That's what's amazing, to see that water fountain flowing smooth, man. The water's flowing over the gems, and they're sparkling. But when we get on the stage, it's fucking all-out war. Like, "Go fuck yourself, here we come."

LEFT: STEPHANIE CABRAL; CENTER: MARTIN PHILBEY/REDFERNS

"I was raised in a blue-collar working environment, where the sun is up and we're going to work. I ended up being a bricklayer, working with Hells Angels and shit."
— Fafara

CAN YOU SENSE A DIFFERENCE IN YOURSELF WHEN YOU'RE PERFORMING WITH EITHER COAL CHAMBER OR DEVILDRIVER ONSTAGE, OR IS IT ALL THE SAME DEZ? I think the Dez of DevilDriver completely blanks out to the point where if I'm onstage and a guy comes up to hug me or fight me, I'm so blanked out that I could kill you and not remember it. In Coal Chamber ... the word "reserved" is not right. I'm just as vicious with Coal Chamber, but I'm in a weirder, goth headspace.

DEVILDRIVER ARE GETTING READY TO RELEASE *DEALING WITH DEMONS II* THIS SPRING. THE RECORD'S "BLOODBATH" TOUCHES ON THE CONCEPT OF KEEPING THE BEAST AT BAY. HOW MUCH BETTER ARE YOU AT DEALING WITH YOUR STRUGGLES THESE DAYS? I think everybody has the tendency to beat their heads against the floorboards. Here's the thing: I've been through a lot. I don't care if you have a billion dollars, you're going to have death and sickness around you; you'll fall down and break your ankle; your friend will commit suicide. I've had all of those and more. And in the last three years: going through my wife's [battle with] cancer; I fell down the stairs, twisted my ankle and was laid up for months; I almost died from COVID. But I handle pressure as I always did, which is like, "Fuck you, I'm going to get over this. I'm going to pick myself up, and I'm going to rise like a phoenix." That's through anything. It didn't matter if it was a teacher in elementary school tying me to my chair during one class, which nowadays she would have gone to jail for doing...

ANNAMARIA DISANTO/WIREIMAGE

DevilDriver, 2007; (right) Coal Chamber circa 1996

SORRY, WHY DID YOUR TEACHER DO THAT? Well, I have ADHD. I had problems all throughout school. Teachers are tremendously slow, and they talk to you tremendously dumbed-down. You're in this room with fluorescent lights, there's no vibe going on, and they expect kids to learn. You've got a kid that has ADHD, that only sleeps five hours a night … and I'm jumping out of my skin. I'm getting out of my chair; I'm going to get a drink; I can't focus; I'm fucking with the kid behind me. The teacher just got fed up and tied me to a goddamn chair. When my mom found out about it, she went insane. I bring that up to say I rose through that. There's actually a lyric I have in DevilDriver [on 2005's "End of the Line"] which is "dust myself off and go it again."

YOUR FATHER, TIGER FAFARA, WAS AN ACTOR. DID HE SHARE ANY WISDOM ABOUT THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY AS YOU WERE ENTERING IT? No. My father was an actor — he's got a mile-long IMDB — but I was never raised with him. My mom sent me away to go live with him for a summer, but that was it. My stepfather, who recently passed, raised me on a jobsite. That guy was Clint Eastwood mixed with John Wayne. I was raised in a blue-collar working environment, where the sun is up and we're going to work. I ended up being a bricklayer, working with Hells Angels and shit.

THINKING OF THAT WORK ETHIC, PLUS THE ACCUMULATED EXPERIENCE OF 30 YEARS WITH COAL CHAMBER AND DEVILDRIVER, HOW DOES THAT ALL TRANSLATE TO MANAGING VETERAN BANDS LIKE EXODUS, OR RISING ACTS LIKE JINJER OR GROUNDLIFT, THROUGH THE ORACLE? The advice has always been simple, because I got shitty advice before I had my first record deal. … I'll give you a brief synopsis: There was a minute where I'd hurt my back on the jobsite, and I had to find something to go into that I loved. My mom had a friend that was a hairdresser, and I saw the life that that guy led, and it was 10 girlfriends, a lot of money and great cars. So, I went into that.

I was working in Beverly Hills before I got my record deal. I could name a million stars that I worked with — or Nancy Reagan, with her security standing next to me to make sure I didn't do anything [untoward] — but one of the guys that came in a lot was Paul Stanley. Keep in mind, I had KISS all over my walls; I was in the KISS Army. Paul came in and I said, "Hey Paul, we got a record deal! I don't know if I'll be around here much longer, so great working with you." And bro said, "You don't want to do that, Brad. You're going to hate it. It's long hours. You're going to hate this life." And this is one of my fucking heroes telling me not to go for it! I gave that guy the middle finger when he walked out.

To answer your question, what I tell Groundlift, or older guys like Exodus, is put your head down in the wind and keep running. Until your legs are chopped off, keep running. Do not give up your dream for anyone else.

LEFT: NAKI/REDFERNS; RIGHT: MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS

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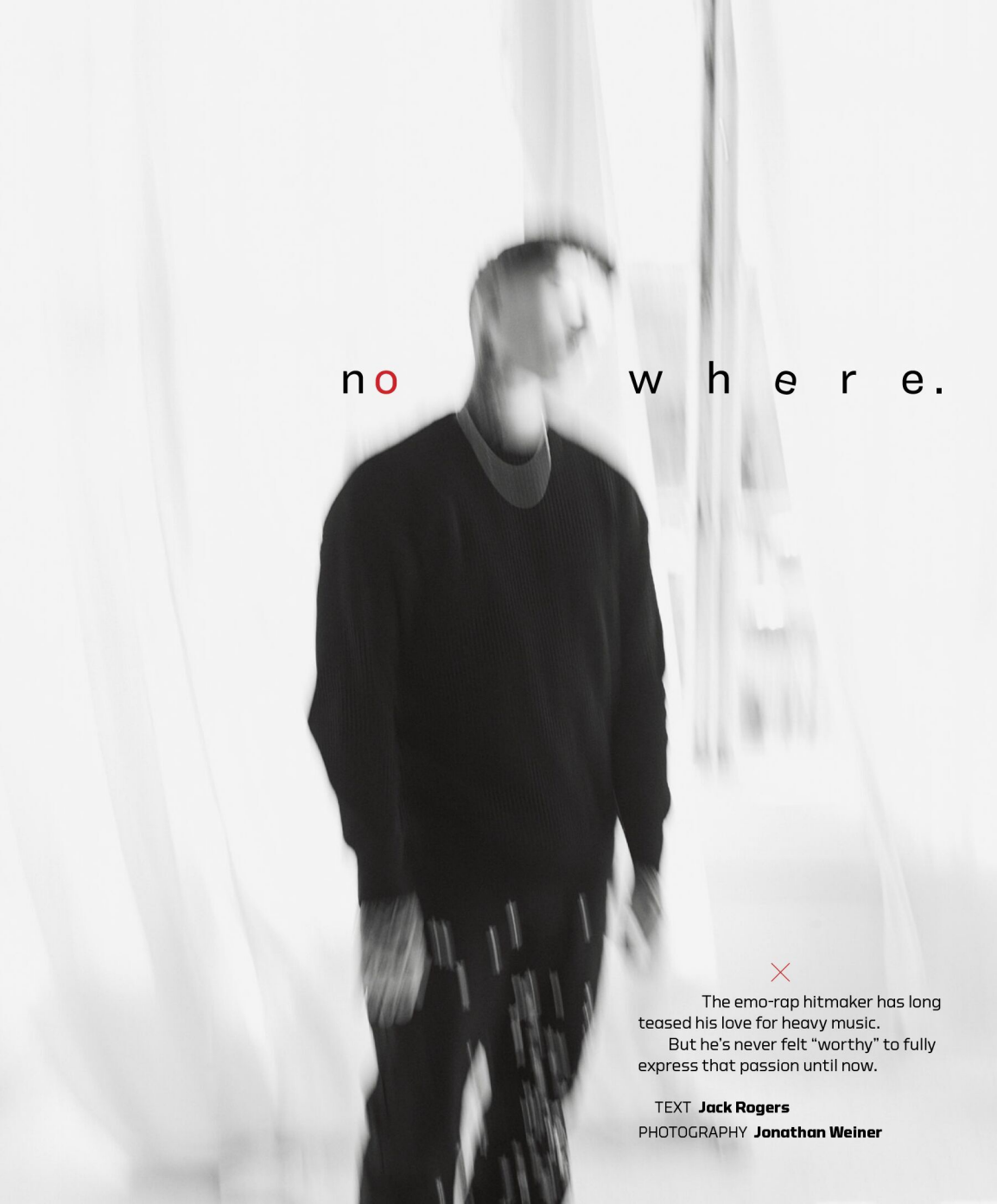

no where.

The emo-rap hitmaker has long teased his love for heavy music. But he's never felt "worthy" to fully express that passion until now.

TEXT **Jack Rogers**

PHOTOGRAPHY **Jonathan Weiner**

"IT FEELS LIKE A RETURN TO MY ROOTS. NOT AS NOTHING,NOWHERE., BUT AS A HUMAN BEING."

JOE MULHERIN SMILES AS THESE WORDS LEAVE HIS LIPS.

There's an overarching joy in the emo-rap star's tone as he talks about his new and fifth album *VOID ETERNAL*. It's a poignant benchmark in his career; a record on which he was finally able to abandon self-doubt and fully embrace a formative side of his musical passion that had long been subdued: heavy metal.

Coming up through the alt-rap boom that took bedroom producers from SoundCloud to superstardom, the last seven years have seen the nothing,nowhere. mastermind go above and beyond his own expectations. Specializing in a despondent brand of emotionally intense alternative hip-hop, Mulherin caught the attention of Fueled By Ramen very early on, and, with each release, has proven himself to be one of the most consistently cathartic, adventurous and popular artists in whatever lane he's travelled. The brooding hypnotic trap of "hammer," for example, has racked up over 54 million streams on Spotify, while the heart-wrenching, melodic rock of "fake friend" broke nothing,nowhere. into *Billboard's* Alternative Airplay Chart. Over the years, Mulherin has also worked alongside scene legends Travis Barker and Dashboard Confessional, collabed with deadmau5 and ILLENIUM, opened for Fall Out Boy and Good Charlotte and received critical acclaim from mainstream outlets including *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone* and more.

But with *VOID ETERNAL*, Mulherin realized it was time to do something a bit different and delve back into his first true love. "I think when people listen to my older songs, or the songs I have on the radio, they would be surprised to know that deathcore, hardcore and post-hardcore are my favorite genres," he says. "To create something like this feels like I'm repaying the favor. It's a real full-circle moment."

"This is something that I have always wanted to do," Mulherin continues, "but the voice in my head kept saying that I shouldn't do it or release it because I wasn't an established band. I was always skeptical, even though it has been the music I love the most. It's just different now, and I feel like I'm landing on a new planet because of it. It's a very sharp turn, but it is my truth, and it feels natural. I put up these walls for so long, and I considered people's expectations more than my desire to create something that I wanted to. And because of that, *VOID ETERNAL* is the purest expression of myself that I have ever created."

Mulherin may have tempered his heavy-music predilections in the past, but he's never hidden them. He often sports a Nails hoodie, and 2020's gnarly "DEATH" is nothing,nowhere.'s take on industrial post-hardcore, the video for which features Mulherin cloaked in black, draped in chains and absolutely raging.

But *VOID ETERNAL* is what happens when you cannonball rather than dip your toes. nothing,nowhere.'s new 12-song collection is a corrosive, contortive blend of raw screams and incendiary bars wrapped in the most brazen of metal riffs and razor-sharp production. It also features a plethora of special guests: from established icons — Fall Out Boy's Pete Wentz and Silverstein's Shane Told — to rising trailblazers, including SeeYouSpaceCowboy's Connie Sgarbossa, Static Dress' Olli Appleyard and rapper Freddie Dredd. There's even a raucous guest shot from Lorna Shore's Will Ramos showcasing a new shade of his incredible vocal range.

It is a bold and hard-earned statement that firmly places nothing,nowhere. as one of the most exciting voices in the scene. And in many ways, *VOID ETERNAL* is the perfect record to represent what's happening in heavy music in 2023. No rules. Nothing off-limits. Whatever feels right *is* the right thing to do.

Mulherin is talking to *Revolver* in late January from Reaper Ranch, his gorgeous kingdom of solitude in the heart of the Vermont wilderness. In the main house, exposed wooden beams hold up its towering ceiling, and its pristine wall-length windows let the natural light shine and fill the whole space from dawn till dusk. His cat Boo sticks their head out from the top of the open stairs, looking curiously around at what is happening before quickly popping back out of sight. There are currently about eight inches of snow outside, adding even more depth to the beautiful silence surrounding the land. When he isn't spending time tending to his chickens, Mulherin can be found exploring the woods behind his home, extracting maple from the trees or building fires and meditating on the life he has created for himself.

Such a tranquil environment is a stark contrast to the dark, aggressive songs Mulherin was writing for *VOID ETERNAL*, which he recorded entirely in the beautiful studio built within his barn. But after making his previous full-length, 2021's *Trauma Factory*, mostly in L.A. alongside producer Zakk Cervini and surrounded by outside voices, being able to carve out the sound he always wanted in a place he feels the calmest and most collected was a pleasure he didn't take for granted.

"In the past, I have had people in my ears saying that if I did something a certain way I would make more money, but it was more about whether or not it was right for me," he says. "Money is always going to be the driving factor for everything, and alternative music has become a part of that in recent years. But at the end of the day, people underestimate their audience — the real ones will notice what the fake

STEPHEN J. COHEN/GETTY IMAGES

shit is and what the real shit is. … I'm not fussed if the grocery store plays my music. It's about me being happy and proud of what I do."

He grins. "If you're putting a breakdown in a song, I'm sure your first intention isn't to go No. 1 on the *Billboard* charts. You're making the music you want to make, and that's where I am."

Today, Mulherin speaks with refreshing candor about his ambitions — but the road to these personal and professional insights hasn't always been the easiest one to navigate. Back in 2015, when he posted his first music as nothing,nowhere. on SoundCloud, the ethereal "don't mind me," it was simply to get thoughts out of his head and off his desktop — a vessel to provide himself with a glimmer of peace when he had struggled to find some. And overnight, he became an underground sensation, racking up over half a million streams in the blink of an eye.

Ever since, he's been fighting against the voices in his head that make him question whether he is worthy of all this attention. That push and pull between confidence and self-doubt has always plagued him, resulting in the employment of different coping techniques along the way: remaining anonymous for the early part of his career and then, later, keeping his face covered in photos.

"I've struggled with imposter syndrome for a long time. With every milestone I reach, there's a new reason for my brain to make me feel not worthy and inadequate," he admits. "It's always been there, but it's only recently that I really started to tell myself that I should be allowed to express myself authentically and I deserve to be where I am. I've worked hard. I feel like I took the scenic route to get to here."

Too rap for rock, too rock for rap and possibly too dark for both — nothing,nowhere. has always had to find its own way. However, that's also where Mulherin thrives as an artist. He's been able to fight the demons in his head by telling them he is happy and settled in being the outlier; it's one of his biggest strengths and something he continues to be proud of to this day.

> "When I posted my first song, if you had said I would be collaborating with a deathcore vocalist one day, it wouldn't make sense. I'm so glad that it does now."
> — Joe Mulherin

"From the very beginning of nothing,nowhere., even then, I knew what I was doing was something that nobody else was," he says. "When the scene formed around what I did, I then went and tried to do something else. When that shifted, I moved into something else again. I never want to be comfortable in a space because I don't want to blend in with anybody. You can't grow if you simply become complacent."

Enter *VOID ETERNAL*, the record that Mulherin describes as "the final boss" in his journey to becoming the artist he has always wanted to be. A culmination of his love for all things brutal, both musically and lyrically, it delivers heart-stopping emotion alongside crushing brute force like it's second nature. There's the industrial grit of Code Orange, whose own Eric "Shade" Balderose directed the visualizer for "MEMORY_FRACTURE," and the shirt-tugging intensity of Underoath on "VENoM." Then you have the discordance of Poison the Well ("TRAG3DY"), the raging rap-metal of Linkin Park ("THIRST4VIOLENCE") and the darkness of the Red Chord ("SUICIDE_PACT") — every track celebrating what has come before while pushing the form into the future.

It's a bleak, powerful album. Desolate poetry and achingly melodic moments go head-to-head with skull-cracking riffs and guttural bellows — resulting in a beautiful chaos. For Mulherin, that chaos comes from a place of clarity.

"I have really been into stoicism recently," he says with a nod. "I love philosophy, and I've been reading Marcus Aurelius' work on meditations. This record sounds really hopeless and bleak and dark. But with

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"I've struggled with imposter syndrome for a long time. It's only recently I started to tell myself I deserve to be where I am."
— Mulherin

stoicism, there is a disturbing reality that nothing matters. That's the conclusion that you come to. Nothing matters, but at the same time, there's beauty in that.

"You create your own meaning," he continues. "What matters is what you *make* matter. So that's why the lyrical content is so brutal because it is what matters to me. It is my self-therapy. And being on my own quiet plot of land, next to a town of 2,000 people who probably have no idea what post-hardcore is, really allowed me to scream my thoughts and insecurities as loud as I could — and mean them."

And to be able to express that alongside talents like Will Ramos — who delivers a vocal on the emotional, turbulent "TRAG3DY" unlike anything he has committed to tape — is something that Mulherin appreciates even more.

"With Will, people are always expecting him to do the same thing that he has become famous for, and I can relate to that from the emo-rap perspective," he says. "It's nice when someone approaches you with something different, and that's exactly what Will brought to the table. He is so talented as a vocalist that it doesn't matter what you give him. You could give him a jazz track, and he would find a way to make it work. It was an honor to have someone like him on the record, the most talked-about screamer in the world right now."

Mulherin pauses, adding, "When I posted my first song, if you had said that I would be collaborating with a deathcore vocalist one day, it wouldn't make sense. But I'm so glad that it does now."

As a community, heavy music is, arguably, experiencing one of the most expansive periods in its history. And artists like nothing,nowhere. becoming a part of the genre in such a vicious and visceral way makes it even more exciting and colorful. Mulherin is on a mission to share that color with as many people as he can.

"I want the world to listen to better music," he says, with a laugh. "So, I'm trying to put people onto it with this album as much as anything. I know a lot of nothing,nowhere. fans don't have the same music taste that I do, but they find out about so much just from supporting me. To be able to share something that I love with people that may never have been exposed to it otherwise is crazy."

Mulherin will launch his campaign to improve the world's listening habits later this year, when he hits the road with Wage War and Spite to show a whole new audience what he is capable of — and hopefully turn some more moshers into nothing,nowhere converts.

Since its start, nothing,nowhere. has given Mulherin a place to share his innermost thoughts and feelings in a way that he couldn't anywhere else, and *VOID ETERNAL* has allowed him to unlock doors that he probably didn't know were there. So, as he looks forward, he's safe in the knowledge that this music and his scene has changed him for the better, much like it has changed all of us.

"I never really considered just how positively my own music could impact my own personal growth," says Mulherin. "With all of the insecurities and self-doubt I have had over the course of nothing,nowhere., it may have stifled me in the past because I didn't feel worthy. But I know that I have always deserved to be here. Now I have this belief and confidence; it's a dangerous thing because the sky really is the limit. I grew up being severely impacted by the power of heavy music and how it can soothe the soul, and now I am able to provide that for other people. I have proven myself in every single corner of music, worked with the best of the best and conquered my inner demons. Now, I feel like the real work begins."

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10 ESSENTIAL DJENT ALBUMS

Misha Mansoor

"Djent is not a genre," says Periphery's mastermind. But if it were, these would be its landmark records.

TEXT **Matt Wake**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Ekaterina Gorbacheva**

NOPE. CONTRARY TO SOME BELIEVERS, PERIPHERY GUITARIST MISHA MANSOOR DIDN'T COME UP WITH the prog-metal subgenre name of *djent*. "Meshuggah did," he clarifies. "It was the onomatopoeia of them trying to describe their very metallic palm-mutes that they were chasing."

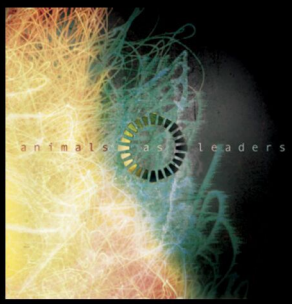
The term started getting thrown around online in the mid-Aughts, and a young Mansoor ran with it. When he'd post his early demos, he'd describe the clips as "djenty," tongue planted firmly in cheek. Soon, many fans began using djent to refer to the style of music played by bands like Periphery, the outfit Mansoor founded in Washington, D.C. circa 2005. "I initially tried to tell people, 'Hey guys, djent's not a genre.' But no one listened because you can't tell anyone anything on the internet." Almost 20 years later, Mansoor seeks to correct the matter by naming his band's new and seventh album, *Periphery V: Djent Is Not a Genre*. "It probably won't," he says with a shrug.

Regardless, the record slams. Tracks like "Wildfire" showcase Periphery's gift for meshing the gnarly and textural. Other highlights include the panoramic pummeling of "Wax Wings." Six of the album's nine cuts clock in at seven minutes plus, including the 12-minute "Dracul Gras," which evokes previous string-swept epics like "Marigold" and "Reptile." Although the pandemic-protracted sessions were "demoralizing at times" as the band struggled to write songs that they "believed in," Mansoor says *Periphery V* "is probably the album I'm most proud of." With a sense of humor about its subtitle, the upbeat and thoughtful Mansoor gave *Revolver* his picks for the 10 essential djent albums that make up this genre … that is not a genre.

MESHUGGAH
***Destroy Erase Improve* (1995)**
I don't want to rank these — that would be very, very difficult. I'm gonna say these are seminal moments in djent history, if you will. And, to me, this really begins with *Destroy Erase Improve*. A lot of people would argue that the [1994] *None* EP is where they really started to figure out that sound. But *Destroy Erase Improve* is a [new] level of refinement. It is an album that sounds phenomenal to this day. It's so ahead of its time it's actually scary. Probably one of the most important albums in metal history.

AFTER THE BURIAL
***Rareform* (2008)**
They're probably one of the first bands that I was aware of that was a signed, touring band that took to eight-string guitars. It was really interesting because they had this sort of melodeath vibe to them. It was almost like they were a melodeath band that discovered Meshuggah, and they're like, "Let's fuse the two together." So there's a lot of really melodic, European-sounding things and then there's a lot of straight-up Meshuggah sections. I remember hearing "Aspiration" for the first time and that superlong pattern with the drums at the end; that part gives me chills.

MESHUGGAH
***Chaosphere* (1998)**
My favorite Meshuggah album — and one of my favorite albums of all time. One of the weirdest, quirkiest albums and mixes. The album name is appropriate because it's just pure chaos from beginning to end. They always do these tracks with clean guitars just as a palate cleanser, and they opted not to do that, and I love it for that. This album is perfect. They kind of chose a path. Because *Destroy Erase Improve* got very proggy and this album is insanely heavy — and it's *only* insanely heavy. It showed a much darker side of them that I feel was like a fork in the road.



ANIMALS AS LEADERS
Animals as Leaders (2009)

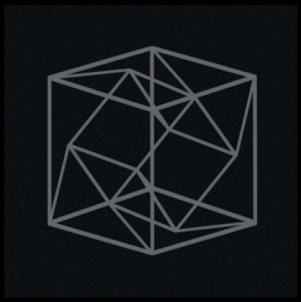
I don't know if this one's a little self-sucky because I did write and produce it with Tosin [Abasi, Animals as Leaders guitarist/founder]. But I think it's a really important album. I think Tosin is one of those brilliant musicians and he's got such a unique approach to guitar. He's one of my best friends, so I am biased. But I think when we created it, it was really special. And we weren't even trying to create anything special at the time — it was just fun, writing with your friend.

FELLSILENT
The Hidden Words (2008)

If you were to talk about proto-djent, in terms of the current movement, this is probably the first and most important album. So, it's Acle [Kahney] from TesseracT and John Browne from Monuments and they had a band together in [the city] Milton Keynes in the U.K. It sounds like a band that's the midpoint between TesseracT and Monuments, predictably so, and it features a very famous clean [guitar] sound that was dubbed the "Milton Cleans." A very glassy, clean sound. I saw videos of them playing live and they sounded so fucking tight. I was like, "This is what I want Periphery to be." Huge inspiration.

TESSERACT
One (2011)

When I was coming up, I was on a bunch of forums, Meshuggah being one of them. You'd see a lot of the same names on these forums: Browne from Monuments, Acle from TesseracT, Paul Ortiz aka Chimp Spanner; these are some of the heavy hitters that would be posting their songs on the forum. It's what got me being like, "Maybe I should start posting my songs, too." Although my stuff sucked compared to theirs, they gave me the motivation to work harder and be better. *One* was like TesseracT's mission statement. This is Acle's thing, his brain and where this is going. It's pretty damn genius and sounds amazing live.



TEXTURES
Drawing Circles (2006)

I was obsessed with Meshuggah and consumed everything that they had up to that point. And then what happens? You want more, so you start looking for bands that sound like them. Unfortunately, back then there wasn't really a djent scene and there weren't really a lot of bands that sounded like that — besides the crappy demos I was doing and the people on the forum. But there were no bands. And Textures was one of the first bands where I was like, Oh, these guys are trying to do something in that vein but with their own twist.

MESHUGGAH
***Nothing* (2002)**
Nothing is probably the most important album for what we would call djent. And this is why I have three Meshuggah albums in this list. I know it seems excessive, but this is how important Meshuggah is. The story goes that they wanted to do an album just on bass guitars. And they had a buddy that was like, "Well, I could make an eight-string guitar with the low strings, and you could still be able to play solos on it." And thus, the eight-string was born. *Nothing* has so much charisma and the songs are so good. So many moments that if you see it live you just lose it.

SIKTH
***Death of a Dead Day* (2006)**
What a heavy hitter. This album changed my life. This was like a modern Dream Theater moment where you're like, "You can't really play this, right?" And they're flawless live. I'm always shocked at how people are not as familiar with this album. If you listen to it, you'll probably hear how it's influenced us. It's so extremely technical but it's so energetic and has so much to say. The lesson I learned from this album is that it's so much more compelling when the conversation is, "Wow, what a great song. And oh my god, by the way, that's really hard to play." And *Death of a Dead Day* is that.

CHIMP SPANNER
***At the Dream's Edge* (2009)**
Chimp Spanner is a musical genius. Everyone in this scene, they're all extremely talented. But Paul Ortiz was — I think we had all agreed on the forums — on a different level; and to this day still is. He has freakish levels of talent. His musical ear is unreal; his guitar ability, engineering and mixing, everything. This album is kind of like stylized versions of songs you'd hear on the forums. It's absolutely perfect from beginning to end — and that dude made it in his bedroom. If you haven't heard this album before, I'm almost jealous that you get to hear it for the first time.

Jesus

TEXT **Mia Hughes**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Gabe Becerra**

PIECE

Five years ago, Aaron Heard's hardcore crew dropped their vicious debut. After a couple detours – into Nothing and fatherhood – he's back with its fierce follow-up and a new mission "calculated for longevity."

SNOW GLISTENS AROUND A LOG CABIN IN THE NEW Jersey woods; a family of deer lingers outside the front door as the day's first light sets in. A tortured scream rises through the trees.

This isn't a fucked-up Disney movie — it's the setting in which Jesus Piece frontman Aaron Heard recorded the vocals for the band's new, long-awaited second album, *...So Unknown*. The idyllic surroundings couldn't have been further from the brutal metallic hardcore that was coming out of these sessions. But five years on from their raw and explosive debut, *Only Self*, which garnered breathless critical acclaim and established them as one of the scene's most invigorating new bands, Jesus Piece were ready to do things a little differently.

"This album is calculated for longevity," Heard explains on a video call from his Philadelphia home, as he prepares a cup of coffee and rolls a blunt. Whereas the band's previous 2018 record was an expulsion of bitter, deeply personal anger that touched on past traumas and crushing political hopelessness, *...So Unknown*, their first for new label Century Media Records, takes a different tack.

Many of the songs, like the pummeling "In Constraints" and the lurching, eerie "Profane," are exercises in character-driven fiction. The ones that are personal take on new, introspective subject matter. "The Bond" makes a plea to Heard's estranged brother; "Fear of Failure" explores the self-reflection inspired by his becoming a father two years ago; and "Silver Lining," while sonically as ferocious as ever, is in fact a love song to his son. The result is a complex, powerful album that builds on the promise of their debut and reasserts that Jesus Piece are still a vital creative force: front and center for the broadening and bleeding of hardcore's boundaries that has marked the last few years.

"I'm trying to avoid being such a negative fuck on these songs," Heard says of his new attitude. "It's very cathartic to do this shit, but the more that I bring [trauma and depression] to the forefront every day, the more I have to live it over and over again. I try to break away from that on this record; try to find a different lane than just voicing my traumas. It's a more sustainable way for me to write songs."

The biggest reason for this change is Heard's new life as a dad. "I was a party animal, acting crazy all the time, touring way too much. [Having a child] allowed me to knock that shit off. I feel like a totally different person." He's determined now to take his life and career more seriously. Plus, as a father he also simply can't afford himself the space for the anger about the world that used to drive him and his lyrics. "I'd be angry as hell. I'd wanna change things, but I didn't know how," he recalls. "I can't be a total fucking nut about it anymore. I don't have the mental capacity to handle anything other than fatherhood."

While *...So Unknown* is more focused and mature than *Only Self*, intensity is still key; if anything, Jesus Piece — which is completed by drummer Luis Aponte, guitarists David Updike and John Distefano and bassist Anthony Marinaro — have gotten even heavier.

"When I hear bands, I listen for the vocalist, and if it feels like their life is OK, I'm kinda out. I wanna hear something unhinged in the voice."
— Aaron Heard

The record alternately evokes Sepultura grooves, the industrial rhythms of Ministry and the atonal precision of Helmet, while Heard's vocals are a potent and vicious death-metal deluge. To get into that headspace when he's recording or performing, the singer says he "just thinks about all the worst shit that's ever happened to me." Any heavy band needs that authenticity, he adds. "When I hear bands, I listen for the vocalist, and if it feels like their life is OK, I'm kinda out. I wanna hear something unhinged in the voice."

Drummer Luis Aponte, speaking to *Revolver* via video from his girlfriend's home in Paris, backs up Heard's bona fides. "Everything he's giving out is real. He's a positive, good dude, but he's definitely an intense, deep person. I love working with people like that, where I know they're not fronting at all."

Jesus Piece's adventurous approach to their craft has been baked into their musical pursuits since day one. They're equally adept at winning over crowds at Turnstile, Knocked Loose and Ghostemane shows, and are collectively and individually down for collaboration and creative experimentation. In between Jesus Piece albums, Heard held down bass duties for Philly shoegaze leaders Nothing — and last year Aponte even got to play drums for pop sensation Charli XCX on *Saturday Night Live*, after her creative director saw a YouTube video of him performing with Jesus Piece.

"It's a weird time to be in a hardcore band, 'cause it wasn't like this when we first started," says Aponte. "The level of where things could possibly go was not where it is now. It's nice to see it leaving our comfort zone, and I'm happy to be a part of pushing a genre and culture I love so much."

For Jesus Piece, abandoning their comfort zone to create *...So Unknown* was an exciting and essential experience — but one that was also fraught with challenges and moments of self-doubt. It had been a long time, and a global pandemic, since the band's buzzworthy debut. They were aware of the music scene's short attention span and how easily bands can fade away. They knew they needed to write something better than before. "It felt like it was an impossible task," says Aponte. "But we were like, If we're gonna do it, let's go all the way. We're a lot more unified now. We all have the same vision — we all feel what we can do is endless. And the pandemic really proved how precious this is."

As soon as the band began recording with producer Randy LeBoeuf in summer 2021, Hurricane Ida hit; and the producer's Philly basement studio was flooded three feet deep. The whole setup had to be moved and condensed to two rooms upstairs. "It's a classic Jesus Piece story — there's nothing we can do without there being some sort of hurdle," Aponte says with a smile. "But Randy didn't cancel on us, and that was insane."

LeBoeuf (whose credits include the Acacia Strain, Dying Wish and more) helped the guys map out their songs piece-by-piece and program ideas with MIDI before emulating them on instruments. His methodical approach was novel to the band, and pushed each member to reach new levels of their ability and vision.

Jesus Piece, (from left) Aaron Heard, Anthony Marinaro, David Updike, Luis Aponte and John Distefano

"Jesus Piece is fucking chaotic, dog. Which I think is important — I don't think you should ever sit in a room where everybody's a yes man." — Heard

"Everything always seemed so amateur before," says Aponte. "This was the first time we really felt professional." Once the instrumental tracks were laid out, Heard and LeBoeuf decamped to the New Jersey cabin to complete vocals. "We spent a week together chilling, cooking breakfast and working on these songs," says Heard. "It had been a while since I'd been in the studio, so I needed to clear my head and be out in nature."

The band's collective goal was to create the best version of Jesus Piece yet. Naturally, passions ran high. The guys would often butt heads over their opinions and ideas. The dynamic was "real and intense," says Aponte. "Things can get heated."

"It's fucking chaotic, dog," Heard agrees. "Which I think is important — I don't think you should ever sit in a room where everybody's a yes man."

All of this coalesced into an album that was worth the five-year wait. Instead of injecting too many surprising twists, the band channeled their focus into making it "hit like a brick house," as Heard puts it. "Fear of Failure" combines smart, menacing riffs and bruising low-end with some of the frontman's most urgent vocals. "Tunnel Vision" is a gut punch of wall-to-wall guitars and machine-gun kick pedal. "An Offering to the Night" even offers a slick, turntable-inspired breakdown. "It's the most mature we've ever sounded. I'm very confident in it," says Aponte.

The record's airbrush cover art, designed by Paris artist Lazygawd, is instantly striking in how it feels more linked to '90s hip-hop aesthetics, or even modern-day streetwear, than hardcore. Jesus Piece also dropped a fashion capsule with streetwear brand Noah to accompany the album's first single, "An Offering to the Night," and filmed their very first music videos, which nod to French hip-hop, anime and *The Matrix*. "The band's art and direction is something that we don't compromise on," says Heard. Adds Aponte, "We will never let a label decide or direct things for us." Aponte, who lives between New York and Paris and moonlights in his electronic project LU2K and as a fashion model, is excited to delve into culture beyond heavy music. "We're taking everything we love and putting it on our platform," he continues. "If we wanted to direct a movie, we would. If we wanted to make a video game, we would."

Heard sums up: "We'd like to be perceived as a band that's not just a band."

Observing Jesus Piece's ascent, there's an electric current crackling behind everything they do. And as they help to lead heavy music into the future, their potential is limitless and combustible. Going forward, the band want to keep pushing into experimental new realms, creating without constraints, and building an all-encompassing world around their band-that's-not-just-a-band. "I wanna be putting ourselves in places we've never seen or never thought we could be. I wanna always feel uncomfortable," says Aponte.

"We are coming into a new sound with the band; we are coming into a new world after quarantine. We're all way more fucking focused," Heard concludes. "We got the eye of the tiger."

PHOBYMO

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Kat Moss

Scowl's vocalist takes us to her favorite Santa Cruz hotspots and shares the personal stories behind her passions

TEXT **Sammi Chichester** PHOTOGRAPHY **Jeremy Brooks**

NO ONE CAN ACCUSE SCOWL OF NOT BEING DIY. IT'S FEBRUARY WHEN *Revolver* reaches vocalist Kat Moss, and she and her bandmates are carefully driving their van, trailer precariously in tow, through Wyoming's "nice snowy, blizzardy weather." The Santa Cruz hardcore crew have embarked on this treacherous cross-country trek to Philadelphia to join Show Me the Body, Jesus Piece and Zulu on tour because, well, they live for this shit.

Scowl's wintry journey is the most recent entry in an unrelenting campaign that has helped the band become one of the leaders of the burning-hot NorCal hardcore scene. Since dropping their acclaimed 2021 debut, *How Flowers Grow*, it's been a crazy ride. They've opened arenas for Limp Bizkit, received public support from heroes like Paramore's Hayley Williams, and later this year, much to Moss' amazement, they'll be playing Coachella. "Oh my gosh, I know!" Moss exclaims of booking the Cali fest. "When I started a hardcore band, I never thought that would even be an opportunity we would ever have."

Despite the accolades and high-profile gigs, Scowl haven't lost touch with the grassroots punk community from which they sprouted. The scene's adventurous spirit is on full display throughout their new and fantastic five-song EP, *Psychic Dance Routine*, which Moss says draws inspiration from some of the heaviest, catchiest Nineties outfits — Nirvana, the Breeders, L7 and Sonic Youth — while exploring some deeply personal subject matter.

"I literally talk about playing, being perceived, being onstage," Moss says of "Opening Night," which examines the singer's public persona versus her "shadow self" out of the spotlight. "I didn't want to overly lean into that because I want it to still feel relatable for people who aren't in that position. But I do think we take a metaphorical stage in everything we do every day." Moss has become keenly aware of this disconnect between perception and reality, and the fallacy that looking good — whether onstage or on social media – is equivalent to *feeling* good. "Everyone, especially with social media and the way our lives revolve around our images, that's the message we receive."

The one place that always keeps Moss grounded is Santa Cruz. Fittingly, when we approached her for this "Favorite Shit" photo shoot, she immediately knew her home turf had to be a part of it. So, a few weeks before Scowl kicked off their East Coast tour, Moss led us down Pacific Avenue to show off her favorite local hangouts — and shout out some of her favorite beauty products. "I was worried for a second that I'd look silly with a makeup palette, or lipstick" Moss says. "I felt sort of materialistic or something. But at the end of the day, this is stuff that's important to my identity."

FAVORITE BIRTHDAY GIFT
* original pressing of Pavement's *Brighten the Corners*

I'm pretty sure I went to Streetlight Records on my birthday last year. Malachi [Greene], who plays guitar in Scowl, he bought me the record as a birthday gift. I was really excited because I don't really own many original pressings of any records. This is one of my favorite Pavement records, and Pavement is one of my favorite bands. The first song that I discovered off of it was "Harness Your Hopes," which is a B-side off of that record. Pavement give me such a nostalgic vibe when I listen to them. It reminds me of being a kid. It reminds me of spending my summers in the backyard and listening to CDs. It just gives me that feeling. I love that Pavement has the ability to do that.

I love collecting vinyl. I'm not in a position to buy every single record I love when I see it. So, I definitely have to be picky. I try to focus on records that I know I'll want to play often, or if it's limited, a first pressing, or something that I might not see again. Streetlight always have a really cool selection of records that are limited — and they also make an effort to support their local scene. They always try to keep Drain and Scowl records in stock. It's really cool.

FAVORITE RECORD STORE
*Streetlight Records

FAVORITE FAMILY HEIRLOOM

*** grandmother's coat**

Oh my god. So this is actually a really special coat. My mom's mom, my *Oma*, lived in Germany. But I knew her. She used to wear this. She was totally kooky. She always wore ripped tights, and she had the coolest style. I have a lot of stuff from her: jewelry and old, old clothing pieces. She was just a sweetheart. She didn't speak a lot of English, but she made it very clear how much she loved me and my sister. Germany is very cold compared to California, so I don't really get to whip this coat out very often. But it's a real fur, real leather, Penny Lane coat, and it's been handed down. It's probably a hundred years old and it's just gorgeous. It's so cozy, and very, very special to me. It's a keepsake.

FAVORITE BLONDIE-INSPIRED FOOTWEAR

*** white vinyl go-go boots**

They stand out; they're so bright. I didn't realize that they were growing into somewhat of an iconic thing. I am just so inspired by Blondie, Suzi Quatro and Joan Jett. That's been pretty prevalent when we were rolling out *How Flowers Grow*; I was really, really embracing that. The boots have become this thing, this kind of entity. And it's fun because I think they're badass boots. I run through these boots pretty quickly. These get replaced often because they just get beat up. They get *so* destroyed on tour. The heels break off once you really stomp around in them. I really feel like I have such a relationship with them, and it feels like an extension of myself.

FAVORITE HAIR DYE

*** Lunar Tides in "Neon Lime"**

It's my happy color. It was always a dream to nail this "Electric Lizard" color. As someone who likes to express themselves with fashion and makeup, I always dye my hair. This time around, I invested in having a hairstylist, Kayla Macadeag, do my color, because I spent years doing it myself: running into Sally [Beauty] with a half-bleached head, just miserable moments. I thought my hair would always be frizzy and dry. But I now realize with the right products and routines, that's not the case. The hair dye I use, it's like a UV green. It glows in the dark, which is really fun onstage in certain lighting. I feel like it's a really large extension of my personality.

FAVORITE VINTAGE STORE

*** Virgo Vintage**

It's basically a curated boutique. As someone who appreciates thrifting both vintage and designer clothing — it's cool because you have that mix, and it's all very selected. I wanted to focus on Virgo specifically because it's a local business and they also take a lot of pride in their displays inside the store; they're very creative. You can just come and hang out. We sometimes have this rush to get into a store, look at everything, buy what you can, get out and repeat. But don't be afraid to look at everything. And find inspiration in what you like; don't focus on following trend cycles.

FAVORITE EYESHADOW PALETTE

*** Claropsyche's "Butterfly"**

When I got the first palette, it blew me away how high-quality the colors were in the eyeshadows. I'd really never used anything that nice. I was hooked. Now, it's kind of my go-to palette on tour because it's compact enough, it has a mirror and it has all the colors I really like. The blues always have the best color payoff compared to a lot of palettes I've used. Blue is a hard color pigment to get [right] ... And most of the pastels also really stand out from a lot of other brands. I've just become very devout.

FAVORITE PLACE TO TALK SHIT WITH DRAIN

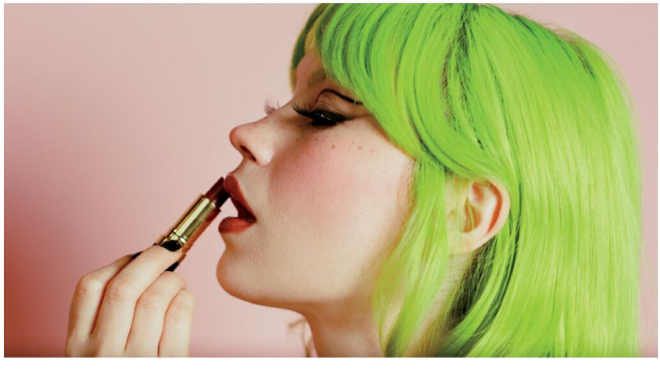
*** Verve Coffee Roasters**

Verve has made a name for themselves in the third-wave coffee world. Before I started touring full-time, I actually had a job at Verve. One of my favorite routines to do when I am home and I have time to kill is go grab my little oat milk latte and an avocado toast. Last summer, every Saturday we'd meet up at Verve with all of our friends in Drain. There was never really a solid plan, but it was just really nice to catch up on everything — and also talk shit and hang out.

FAVORITE TIKTOK MAKEUP TREND

*** Revlon's "Rum Raisin" lipstick**

So I got turned onto "Rum Raisin" back in spring, because it was classic TikTok. Some girl was talking about the classic Nineties lip colors, and it was "Rum Raisin" and "Black Cherry." I was getting tired of the matte lipstick formula and I picked it up and it was to die for. I personally have a hard time with too bright of a red. But this is a perfect, more burnt kind of sienna red. I think it looks good on everyone. The formula is just so creamy, satiny and smooth. But it doesn't bleed like crazy. I mean, Revlon's been around for a while. There's not really any beating it. *And* it's really affordable. I'm a big proponent of [the concept] that you don't have to spend a lot to feel good and to look good. I think if I get too crazy [onstage], it might smear a *little*. I don't mind that look — I just think it looks pretty badass and punk.



FAVORITE WAY TO ENJOY THE SILENCE

*** Sony noise-cancelling headphones**

They kind of changed my whole life on tour. I also wear them walking around the grocery store because it's so calming. I almost lost them not that long ago. I left them in the green room, and my friend grabbed them. I was so horrified when I realized I had left them. Swear to god, I was about to have a breakdown … then I felt so ridiculous for relying on technology like that. But wow, they help me so much, because I do sometimes get very overstimulated. It's nice to have those to be able to check out and just have that silence.

FAVORITE CULT-INSPIRED DESIGNS

*** Havoc Clothing**

I love Havoc. [Founder Cheyenne Snider] combines fashion and a DIY approach with hardcore and punk music. She'll take vintage or upcycled pieces, like silk dresses or skirts, and hand-print band logos and things on them. Like this dress, I really like the color. I love that silky cream; it's really soft and so flattering. Scowl did a collab with Havoc last fall. It was so cool. We had never done something so fashion-forward with our merch.

FAVORITE TAROT CARD

*** Three of Swords**

The Three of Swords and I have a tight relationship. I'm the type of person to pull that card often, when I feel my life is going through major changes. I don't necessarily see the card as a bad thing because I do really respect change — and I closely defend my emotional experiences through my growth. A lot of that ties into our record *How Flowers Grow*. I was pulling Three of Swords; I was pulling Death. I was pulling cards that represented change, growth and self-realization. I don't view it as negative.

As I grow older, and I learn about myself more, I recognize my own relationship with my spirituality is more important than I've chalked it up to be in the past. Starting to embrace that aspect of myself a bit more publicly was kind of scary. But I realized I have every right to do that because it's my own thing.

Q&A: Sully Erna

On the eve of their final album, Godsmack's leader revisits three decades of hits, band therapists, hanging with Rush, dating Lady Gaga and more

TEXT Matt Wake

FOR THE FINAL SONG ON THE FINAL GODSMACK ALBUM, SULLY ERNA WENT BACK to the beginning.

The singer-guitarist wrote the title track to *Lighting Up the Sky* — which closes the hard-rock veterans' new, eighth and what they claim will be last-ever studio record — from the perspective of what he'd say now to a young Sully just starting out. In his trademark bellow, Erna sings of "burning through a life" and "never taking time, never take it slow." Musically, the song shifts from shimmering chords and cinematic picking sequences to the big riffs that have made Godsmack hitmakers since the Clinton Administration.

"If I could go back, would I have done it different?" says Erna, reflecting on the central theme of the title track's lyrics during a recent call with *Revolver*. "Or would I have gone a thousand miles an hour like I did and have no regrets? Because maybe if I didn't do it that way, we wouldn't have gotten to where we've gotten. Is it something I apologize for or something I honor? And so, 'Lighting Up the Sky' is just a metaphor for running a thousand miles an hour around the world."

If Godsmack *really* are getting out of the studio-album biz, *Lighting Up the Sky* is a metric-ton mic drop. The Massachusetts-founded band — which also features bassist Robbie Merrill, lead guitarist Tony Rombola and drummer Shannon Larkin — sounds as inspired and vigorous as ever. Beyond the title track, other highlights include the blues-metal opener "You and I," radio sizzler "Surrender," mystical mini-epic "Growing Old," strings-swathed ballad "Truth" and angular gem "Best of Times."

Lyrically, Erna's themes are reflective throughout *Lighting Up the Sky*'s 11 tracks, the sequencing of which takes listeners on a *Dark Side of the Moon* gone *Mob Rules*-style journey: a 55-year-old rocker who's scaled the mountain, looking back on life, love, loss, family and what makes it all worth it.

Erna's success wasn't overnight. He didn't "make it" until he was in his early thirties, a move that required him to step out from behind his natural instrument, the drums. His years of putting in the work — and every hard-won lesson he's learned since Godsmack formed in 1995 — add weight to what he sings.

"We were one of the last eras," Erna recalls, "where you had to flyer the cars on a certain street that had a nightclub on it, because there was a big band playing that night and a big crowd. You're out there until one in the morning flyering cars and trying to play for a case of beer and $50."

Whereas Godsmack's previous album, 2018's *When Legends Rise*, was more textural, *Lighting Up the Sky* sounds like a high-octane band tearing it up in a room. In other words, it's vintage Godsmack — as heard on their signature hits like "I Stand Alone," "Whatever," "Awake," and the tribal-rock classic "Voodoo."

Which begs the question: why quit now? "We're not announcing the death of the band," Erna clarifies. "We're not announcing a farewell tour. We just don't think there's gonna be another full body of work after this. I mean, I could end up doing a collaboration with another artist or a soundtrack. There may be other things. It just feels like it's the right time to start enjoying the sunset years and really focusing on, like, a greatest-hits show."

Erna says that the band's primary goal moving forward will be to create a striking tour production to present all those hits — and there are *a lot*. For perspective, in 2020 Godsmack tied Van Halen for Top 10 hits on *Billboard*'s Mainstream Rock Songs chart, and their newest single, "Surrender," earned them their 27th Top 10 ranking and held the No. 1 spot for five weeks. At the time of our interview, Godsmack are mostly scheduled for festival dates. At Florida's Welcome to Rockville, they'll perform right before Pantera. It's not a slot for the timid, but they have the bash and bangers required for such a gig. During our chat, presented in the edited excerpts that follow, Erna candidly discusses — in his salt-of-the-earth New England accent — career highlights and lowlights, creating Godsmack's swan song and more.

JESSI LYNN

Godsmack, (from left) Robbie Merrill, Erna, Tony Rombola and Shannon Larkin

"We wanted to be rock stars. And we've arrived. Now we have to ask, 'Well, is this everything we wanted to do with our lives?' For me, the answer is no."
— Sully Erna

FINAL ALBUMS BY LONG-RUNNING BANDS RARELY SOUND AS GOOD AS *LIGHTING UP THE SKY*. BUT WHEN YOU CREATE AN ALBUM THIS STRONG, DOESN'T THAT MAKE YOU WANT TO MAKE MORE OF THEM?

SULLY ERNA Well, thank you. I really appreciate that. We put a lot of effort and thought into this record and because of COVID we had the luxury of time. [*Laughs*] Look, everyone has a goal, right? Some people just go, "I want to have a family and a house with a white picket fence, a dog and a truck." They get that and then they go, "Well, I'd love a motorcycle, too." And they never stop. We wanted to be successful. We wanted to be rock stars. We wanted to do this for a living and be able to support our families and have a decent life. We didn't have to be stadium level, but we wanted to at least accomplish arena level and do it consistently. And we've arrived. Now we have to ask, "OK, well, we always wanted to do this with our lives. But is this *everything* we wanted to do with our lives?" And for me, the answer is no. There are other things I want to do. I want to spend time with the people I love and care about, and enjoy the things that I've worked hard for. But I still want to be able to go out and perform live, like, "Hey, we haven't seen each other in a little bit. Why don't we go hit the festivals this summer and headline and go have some fun with the fans and the music?" And then be able to just go back to your own life without the obligations of a record label or another album.

HOW IS THE BAND GETTING ALONG THESE DAYS? We're tighter than we've ever been. When we first got together, of course, we're young, it's exciting. You go through so many years like that. And then the wear and tear starts, and the alcohol abuse and the drugs and all the things that get you hungover and feel pain and fight. And all that crabbiness starts. It tests your endurance, patience and longevity. There were so many times where we really thought we were hanging it up. We got to that point where we thought maybe it was a good decision to go and get some help — instead of being selfish and ending it and disappointing the fans. So we did that. We worked with a therapist and, you know, regained our brotherhood. And of course, we still had to figure each other out, and we had to get past that moment. But then it all smoothed out. When you're together long enough, and there's so many moments that you have each other's back, I think those moments start to come back and everyone thinks about each other differently. We got over so many hurdles and so many mountains. And now we're on the other side, and we're adults and we have children and families. There's nothing else to challenge each other about. There's no animosity.

***FACELESS* TURNS 20 THIS YEAR. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE ALBUM NOW? DO YOU HAVE ANY STANDOUT MEMORIES WHEN YOU THINK BACK TO THAT ERA?** I liked the record. I don't love the production. When I listen to it, I don't think we got the production right compared to the strength of the songs. I mean, obviously, our biggest single we've ever had, "I Stand Alone" — that stood at No. 1 for 17 weeks on the charts — that's on that record. That was a great moment because I got to do my first real video, with The Rock and Kelly Hu from *The Scorpion King*, which gave me a little bit of an acting bug and I kind of pursued that.

But my fondest memory is I got to meet my idol on that record. It turned out that Rush was playing in Miami when we were down there living and recording that record. [Drummer] Neil [Peart's] assistant reached out to my assistant at the time. He's like, "Hey, we're in town. We know you guys are fans of the band and Sully always talks about Neil [in interviews] and he'd love to have you guys at the show." So they invited us, and it was so ironic because I had just been reading his book *Ghost Rider*, and I was so moved by the book that it inspired me to write the song "Serenity." I had just demoed the thing and handwritten all the lyrics. And so we went to see them. Of course, we had a great time. They put us on the stage during the drum solo and me and Shannon sat there with our Rush hats and shirts and tour books looking like nerds. And I get to meet Neil. I gave him the lyrics to "Serenity" and even asked if he'd be interested in playing the drum track on that song, although he politely declined. He said, "You'll see one day when you're well into your 50s that when you're on break, you're on break. And once this is done, I'm going to be taking some time off." And now I get it because I'm in my 50s. But it still allowed me to establish a relationship with him, and over the years I got to know him really well and hung out with him a few times.

GODSMACK'S 2018 SONG "UNDER YOUR SCARS" WAS INSPIRED BY YOUR TIME DATING LADY GAGA. THAT HISTORY CAME UP IN THE METAL PRESS AGAIN RECENTLY... Listen, I really don't have a lot to say on this topic. What I will tell you is that I have an immense amount of respect for her. I was introduced to her through a mutual friend. We clicked and dated for a hot minute, and there was nothing but respect for each other. ... There may be a lot of people in the world that think she's kooky and crazy because she's so wild with fashion and things like that, but she knows exactly what she's doing. She's an extremely smart businesswoman. And she's kind and super talented. I'm proud to say that I shared some great moments with her. I was able to meet Elton John through her. She's an incredibly great person and those are some very fond memories for me. And I'll leave it there.

KAMAL ASAR

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TUATHA DE DANANN

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PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
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SUPER HEROES & HUNTSMEN
PART ONE
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PG
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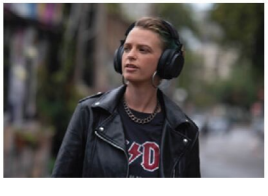

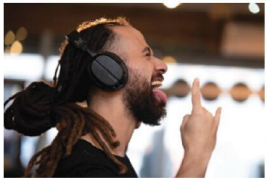

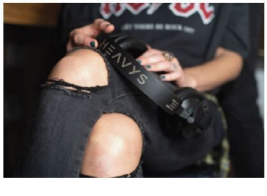

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Metallica approached whiskey-making the same way they've always approached music, pushing to create something original and better. They worked with category-disrupting distillers to create a bold flavor and Meyer sound to create our Black Noise™ sonic-enhancement process. The result is an award-winning, expertly crafted whiskey that was named one of the 20 best in the world in 2022 by *Whisky Advocate*.

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DOUBLE GOLD — SIP AWARDS 2021

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Please Enjoy Responsibly

Bottled By Sweet Amber Distilling Co., Columbus, OH. 45% Alc/Vol.

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